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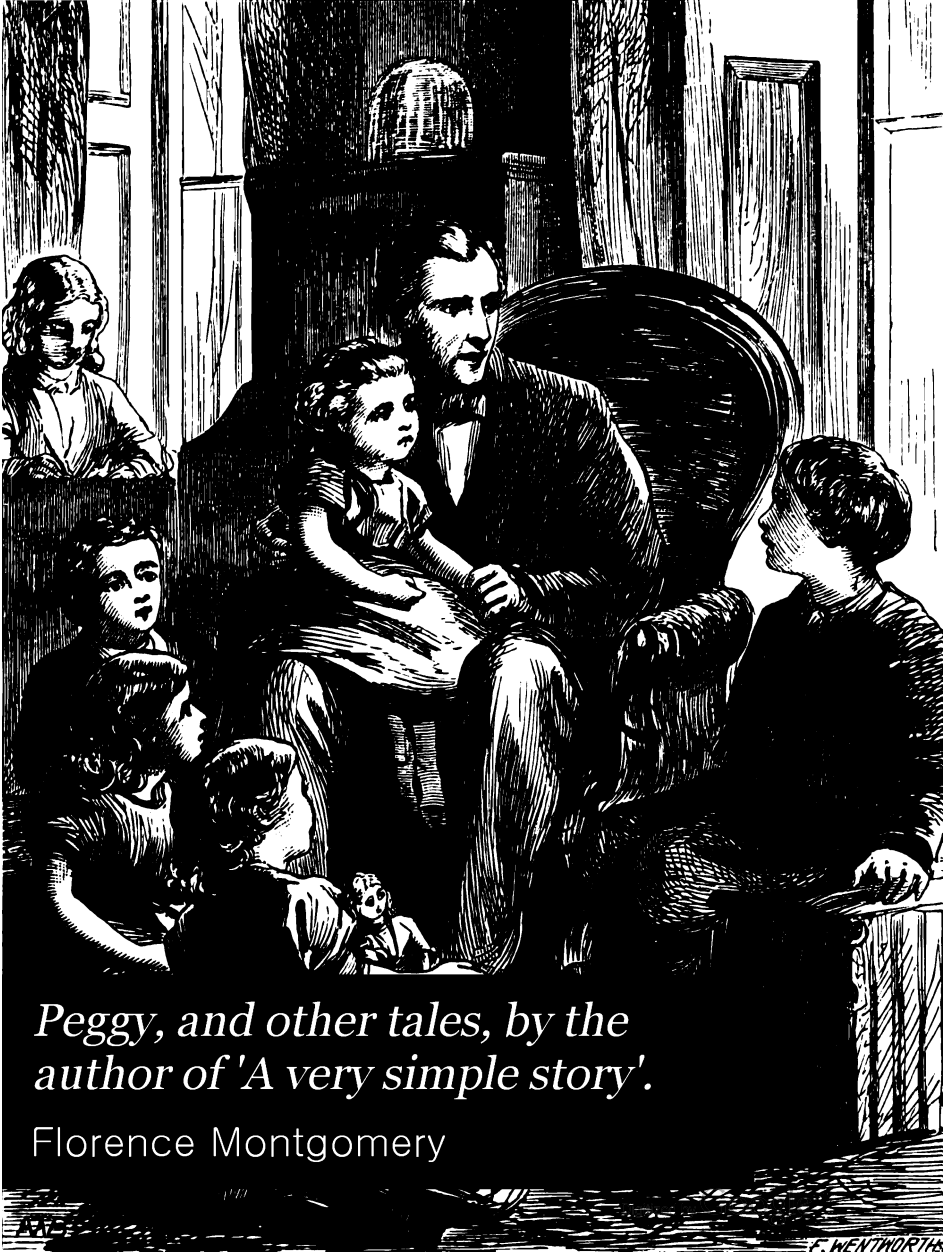

Peggy, and other tales, by the author of 'A very simple story'.

Florence Montgomery

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PAPA RELATES THE HISTORY OF THE THREEPENNY BIT. *Page* 13.

[*Frontispiece.*]

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PEGGY,

AND

OTHER TALES.

BY THE

AUTHOR OF "A VERY SIMPLE STORY."

LONDON:

CASSELL, PETTER, AND GALPIN;

AND 596, BROADWAY, NEW YORK.

1868.

250. g. 390.

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To

MY MOTHER

THESE LITTLE STORIES

ARE AFFECTIONATELY

DEDICATED.

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PEGGY, AND OTHER TALES.

INTRODUCTORY.

THE children had got tired of all their games, for it had been a wet afternoon, and they had been playing ever since luncheon.

Their mother was writing letters for the five o'clock post, so it was no use asking her to read to them; and their father was deep in the newspaper.

"He has been reading it so long," they whispered to each other, "that he must have nearly done. How nice it would be if he would tell us a story!"

"Shall I ask him?" said the youngest of the children.

"Yes, do," answered all the rest.

"Papa," she said, walking boldly up to him,

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and trying to insert her little head between him and the newspaper.

"Hulloa!" said he, putting it down on his knee.

"We want you to tell us a story."

"What about?" asked papa, taking her up in his lap; and the other children, seeing the experiment was likely to prove a success, came round.

"About boys and girls like us," they answered.

"About boys and girls like you?" repeated he, looking round upon the group. "Why, I don't know any other boys and girls *but* you; and it would be no use telling you about yourselves."

"Well, tell us about yourself, and your brothers and sisters, when you were all little," suggested one of the children.

"Ah! that is so long ago," said their father, shaking his head, "that I don't think I can remember."

"Ah! I suppose not," said the little thing on his knee; "you are very, very old, ain't you, papa?"

"Oh, yes; very," said he, laughing; and the

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children wondered why he should be so much amused, for they saw no joke at all.

"How can you talk such nonsense, dear?" said their mother's voice from the writing-table.

"Well but, papa, when you pay visits, and stay about in other people's houses, haven't you seen little boys and girls you could tell us about?" said the eldest boy.

"I'm afraid I never thought much about boys and girls till I had all of you to think about," answered his father. "I am not sure that in the days you speak of, when I used to pay visits, that I was not rather glad, when I came home from shooting or hunting, to find all the children of the house at tea; or, better still, gone up to bed."

"It was very cross of you, papa," said the youngest child, hotly.

"So it was, darling," he answered, stroking her hair; "but it was a long time ago, so you must forgive me."

"But I wish we could find some one who is always going about to different houses, and noticing children," said a boy who had not yet spoken; "do you know such a person, papa?"

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"I don't know if you would call it a person," said his father: "but I *do* know a person, indeed a great many persons, who are always going in and out of people's houses. They are welcome everywhere, and no one ever tries to keep them out. They are favourites with all, old and young, rich and poor; but whether they notice the children among whom they are thrown, is another thing."

"And are *they* glad to find the children gone to bed, when they come home from hunting or shooting?" asked the little one; "because, if they are, they are nasty, cross things, and I don't want to hear about them."

"You can't forgive poor papa for saying that, can you, Tiney?" said her father, laughing, and kissing her; "but I really don't know; because these persons can't speak, and so they have never told me. But I am certain of one thing, and that is, that they never went out shooting or hunting in their lives. They could not, poor things, because they have no bodies: only heads."

"Oh! how horrible!" exclaimed the children.

"So that you see," their father went on,

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looking round in great amusement at their disgusted faces, "they could not sit upon a horse, because they have no legs; and they could not hold a gun, because they have no arms."

"And have you ever seen these persons yourself?" asked a little boy.

"Oh! often," he answered; "but still not so often as I should like. They used to stay with your mother and me, sometimes, when we first married; but, somehow, since all you children came, I cannot get them to pay me long visits. They come to the house, certainly; but they are generally off again in a few days."

"They are not fond of children, I suppose?" said an indignant voice.

"Oh! I don't know that," said the father; "they may be; and I am sure children are very fond of them. In fact, I do not know any one who is not fond of them. From the queen to the beggar-boy, there is not a person who is not glad to see them come, and sorry to see them go. There is no house that is not open to them, and no people with whom they are not friends. Many are the stories they must have to tell."

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"Oh, papa! do tell us who they are," said several impatient voices.

"Ah! but that is what you must guess," said he.

"It is some joke, I know," said the eldest boy; "it can't be quite true."

"I assure you," replied his father, "that you will find I have not said anything that is not strictly true."

"Heads and no bodies!" said the youngest child; "should I be afraid of them, papa?"

"I don't think so," he answered, smiling; "they would lie as quiet as possible in your little hand."

"Heads and no bodies!" said the other children; "have *we* ever seen them, papa?"

"Often," he replied; "there are some in the room now."

"Lie in my hand!" repeated Tiney, meditatively, and she spread out her little fingers, and gazed at them with a new interest; "they must be very small, papa."

"So they are, some of them," said he, kissing the little palms; "so small that there would be room for several of them even in these wee hands."

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"Oh! *please* show them to us," said the two youngest children.

Their father put his hand into his waistcoat pocket, and drew out some money, which he laid upon the table.

The elder children laughed a little; but the younger ones looked disappointed.

"Oh! papa, papa, what dreadful stories you have been telling!"

"Upon my word!" said their father, "I really must defend myself against these accusations. Now, what have I said that you think is untrue?"

"You said they had heads."

"And what do you call this that is stamped on each coin?"

"You said they go in and out of people's houses, and that everybody is very fond of them."

"Well, does not money do so; and do you know any one who is not fond of it?"

"But you said they used to come and pay you and mamma visits before we were born."

"So they did. I used to bring money home from the Bank, and as we did not spend it so

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fast then as we do now, why of course it stayed with us longer."

"But you said they never would come to pay you long visits, now."

"And if you were to see the weekly bills sometimes, you would agree with me, that they run away from us very quickly."

"But you said they have many stories to tell."

"People who travel about as much as they do, must, of course, have a great many stories to tell, *if* they could speak."

"Ah! but they *can't* speak; so it is all nonsense. We shall get no story, after all."

"But supposing that I make one of them tell his own story?"

"Oh! do, do!" said all the children.

"Well, then," said he, "you must choose whether it shall be a sovereign, half-sovereign, half-crown, shilling, sixpence, fourpenny, or threepenny-bit, that shall tell you all that has happened to it, and all about the little people it has lived with since it was coined."

The children came round the table, and their father put all the money in a row for them to choose from.

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They mostly agreed that the Sovereign should tell his story; but Tiney was rather drawn towards the Threepenny bit. "It would tell such a nice, wee story; wouldn't it, papa?" she said.

So Tiney carried the day, and the Sovereign was returned to her father's pocket. The rest were consoled by the promise that if there were time, when the Threepenny had done, the Sovereign should tell *his* little story later.

Tiney was allowed to have the Threepenny bit in her lap; and the other children sat down on the floor round her, while her father began.

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THE HISTORY

OF

THE THREEPENNY BIT.

CHAPTER I.

"My story is not a very grand one, for it is chiefly about a ragged little girl whose name was Peggy.

"I spent the first days of my life in the banker's drawer, and then was given in change to a lady who came to the bank, and who, when she got home, was touched by the sight of a tiny child standing near the door-step, and put me into her cold little hand. So that is how I came into Peggy's possession.

"It was a very cold afternoon—wet and foggy; and I think the lady was sorry to see a little child all alone in the gloomy streets, for she smiled very kindly as she held me out, saying,

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"'Here, little girl, take this!'

"When the carriage had driven up to the door, there had been a rush of children's heads to the window, and the lady had kissed her hand to them, and nodded and laughed as she went up the steps.

"There was a rich, red glow in the room behind the children's heads, as if a capital fire was burning. The light flickered on the wall and on the children's hair; and they all looked so bright and happy, that the mother's eyes had glowed as she looked at them.

"It was just then that, turning round to speak to the footman, she had perceived the poorly-clad child standing by the area rails, and moved, I suppose, by the contrast between it and her own well-cared-for little ones, had held me out to the little girl with a kind and pitying smile.

"As Peggy advanced to receive me, the lady looked very attentively at her, with a rather puzzled expression. I think she was going to ask her some question; but the children began to tap on the window-pane impatiently, and the mother hurried in.

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"Then all the heads disappeared from the window, and I could almost fancy I heard the noisy greetings with which she was received.

"But the footman came to the window and began to put up the shutters; so the bright glow was soon hidden, and the happy scene shut out from my sight.

"I had plenty of time to observe all this, for my new mistress seemed so astonished at finding herself the possessor of a threepenny bit, that she remained transfixed for some time, staring at me with her great round eyes.

"She was about six years old, but was not tall of her age.

"She was miserably clad. Her ragged little frock was made of thin cotton, and she had neither shoes nor stockings. Her sleeves were short, and her poor little bare arms left exposed to the cold.

"But for all that, it was a very bright little face that peeped under her dirty little sunbonnet, and the smile that lit it up when the lady held me out to her was the sunniest I ever saw.

"I don't know whether it was the smile or

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the hair that made one feel that Peggy was a happy child, in spite of her scanty clothing and red arms—they were both so very sunny.

"I suppose the little blue fingers had seldom grasped anything but a halfpenny or penny, to judge by the unfeigned delight with which the child squeezed me in both hands.

"'Peggy's own!—Peggy's very own!' she exclaimed; and the sunny smile broke out again, illumining the whole face as before.

"And then Peggy gave a little bound into the air, and set off running with all her might.

"She went pattering along the sloppy pavement at a great rate, till she got out of the quiet streets into the broad light and glare of Oxford Street.

"Here she slackened her pace, and, stopping at a shop, opened her little hand cautiously, and took another look at me.

"'Still there; not lost yet,' she said to herself in great glee; and then, squeezing me tight, she set off again.

"She went along now with a sort of hop, singing to herself meanwhile a funny little song, which was as like this as I could catch it:—

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"'Oh! what fun,
To have a plum bun!
How I wish it never was done!'

Rose and the Ring.

"The passers-by did not seem to inconvenience Peggy the least: she danced straight on, as if they were not there, and never got in any one's way. She skipped over the side crossings in the same independent manner, and did not seem at all to mind being halloed at by carters and cabmen. I suppose she was so accustomed to it. Even at the wide crossing in Oxford Street she did not stop her song, but went merrily into the puddles under the horses' heads, as if being run over was a trifle which was quite beneath her to take any pains to avoid.

"Turning out of the brilliantly-lighted street, Peggy went into darker and less frequented parts.

"It was a wretched neighbourhood into which we were now coming, but Peggy seemed quite at home.

"Squalid poverty reigned here; the houses were small and dirty, and the population seemed of the lowest kind.

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"I noticed that Peggy squeezed me rather tighter as we advanced, as if she did not feel quite so sure of my safety as she had in the more civilised regions we had lately quitted.

"We turned presently under an old archway, which led into a court. Here groups of dirty children were playing, or, more often, quarrelling; while, every now and then, the harsh voices of their angry mothers were heard shouting to them from the windows of the houses.

"Peggy went into one of the smallest and dirtiest of the houses, mounted a creaky wooden staircase, and pushed open a battered old door.

"'Mammy!' she said, 'look here! Guess what I've got!'"

CHAPTER II.

"THERE was no answer to Peggy's appeal, and the child advanced into the room.

"A more miserable place could not be. It was very small, and would have been utterly bare of furniture, but for something in one corner which probably was meant to represent

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a bed, but which looked more like a heap of old clothes.

"The only light in the room came through a slanting window in the roof; but as, out of its four panes of glass, three had been broken, and replaced by rags or paper, the assistance it afforded was but slight.

"The rags, too, were quite insufficient to keep out the cold wind, which came rushing with a moaning noise through every aperture, and added to the general discomfort.

"A few ashes in the small grate showed that a fire had once been there, but it must long since have burnt out, for the room felt cold and damp.

"Peggy advanced on tiptoe.

"'Are you asleep, mammy?'

"A pale face started up in the bed, with a scared look upon it; but at the sight of the child it changed into a faint smile.

"The smile was the very ghost of the child's own, and might have been once as bright and sunny; but, oh! it must have been very long ago.

"Still, faint as it was, it lit up the wan face

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wonderfully, revealing the likeness between mother and child.

"A likeness, and yet a contrast.

"The likeness lay in eyes, and lips, and hair; the contrast was between health and sickness, joy and sorrow, hope and despair. A contrast at once pleasant and painful: pleasant, to think that the mother *had* once been like the child—that there had been a day when the pale face had been as bright, and the sad eyes as sparkling; painful, to think that the child *might* become like the mother—that the day might come when care, and poverty, and sickness should take all the brightness out of the radiant smile, and lay the young head low.

"Terrible must have been the life that had wrought the change so soon, for the mother did not look more than eight or nine-and-twenty.

"'Is it you, Peggy?' she said, faintly; but even those few words brought on such a violent fit of coughing, that she was obliged to lie down again.

"'Are you worse, poor mammy?" asked the

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child; but the answer was so faint she could not catch it.

"She climbed up on the bed, and began stroking her mother's cheek.

"'Poor mammy, please get better.'

"The smile broke out all over the pale face again, illumining the worn features as before, and the mother took one of the little hands and kissed it.

"'Give me a little milk, dearie,' said she.

"Peggy clambered down from the bed, and began looking round the room, as if in quest of something.

"A perplexed expression came into her face, as her gaze wandered round the empty apartment, and she rubbed her eyes as if she thought she could not see rightly.

"'Why, mammy!' she exclaimed at last, 'where's the table?'

"The pale face on the pillow flushed, but there was no answer.

"'Mammy,' repeated the child, much louder, 'what has become of the table?'

"'Pawned, Peggy.'

"'Mother,' said Peggy, with flashing eyes, 'has father been home?'

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"'Yes, Peggy.'

"There was a pause for a moment, and then Peggy burst out crying.

"'He's very, very wicked, mammy; and I can't bear him.'

"'Peggy!'

"'I cant't help it, mammy,' sobbed the child; 'it *is* very wicked of him to take the table, that he may spend the money on drink. It was the chair last week; now it's the table. I s'pose he'll take the bed next, and leave you nothing to lie upon. Oh, mammy, mammy! why does he want to drink such a lot?'

"'He's so very thirsty, dearie.'

"'*Why* is he so thirsty, mother?'

"'We are all thirsty sometimes, Peggy. *I* am very thirsty now, and it would be much kinder and better if Peggy were to give me the milk I asked for, instead of saying naughty things about her father.'

"The child stopped crying directly, and wiped her eyes with her ragged frock.

"'I'll be good, mammy,' she said, remorsefully; 'but I can't think where the milk can be, and you want it so;' and at the idea of

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her mother having to go without, Peggy's lip quivered again.

"'Father put it on the floor, close by the bed, so that I could reach it easily,' her mother answered; 'that was kind of him, wasn't it?'

"'Yes, that was kind,' repeated Peggy, as she knelt down, and began groping about; 'but—oh! mammy, mammy!' and Peggy burst out crying again.

"'What is it, child?' asked the sick woman, alarmed.

"'The milk's all upset!' sobbed Peggy.

CHAPTER III.

"PEGGY did not recover from this second calamity for some time, and she had to be taken on the bed, and kissed and petted a great deal before she could be restored to anything like calmness.

"'Don't fret, my lamb; a little water will do quite as well.'

"'No, it won't,' said Peggy, starting up suddenly in the bed, and laughing, with the

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tears still standing in her eyes—'no, it won't, mammy; it shan't, neither. I'm going straight off to buy you milk enough to last all night.'

"'There's not a penny in the house, dearie,' said the sick woman, sadly.

"'Ha, ha! but there is,' retorted the child, in great delight. 'Look here, mammy!'

"The mother strained her eyes to see what the little hand disclosed so triumphantly, but the scanty light afforded by the broken window was fast fading away.

"'What is it, dearie? I can't see.'

"'A threepenny bit, mammy! Only fancy! A real silver threepenny bit; my very, very own!'

"'Peggy,' said her mother, gravely, 'have you been begging?'

"'No, mammy; not a bit. Guess how I got it.'

"'Picked it up, may be?'

"'No, mammy. Will you guess again, or shall I tell you?'

"'Tell me, dearie.'

"'It was a kind lady,' said Peggy, 'with such a kind face, and a very warm shawl on.

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"A REAL SILVER THREEPENNY BIT." *Page* 26.

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She was getting out of her carriage as I passed, and I stopped to look. When she saw me standing by the door-step, she held it out, and said, "Here, little girl; take this!" I love that lady, mammy; for she smiled so kindly at me.'

"'God bless her!' murmured the sick woman.

"'She didn't look at me a bit like most smart ladies do,' the child went on. 'I can't exactly say *how* they generally look, but it isn't a nice look. Almost as if they said, "Dirty, ragged little girl, don't come near me!" and they pull up their smart gowns as if they were afraid to let them touch me. I don't mind that, you know, so much, mammy, because I know I *do* walk into puddles, and my feet are very muddy, and might spoil the pretty dresses if I trod on them; but it's the look I don't like. Why do they look at me like that, mammy? I don't do them any harm. Do you know the look I mean, mammy dear? I can't quite explain it.'

"'I know it well, dearie,' murmured the sick woman.

"'Well, my kind lady's look was quite different,' Peggy went on. 'Do you know, mammy,

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she looked at me almost as if . . . . well, almost as if she loved me, mammy. Do you think she *could* love such a ragged little thing as me?'

"'I dont think she could help it, my lamb,' answered the mother, clasping the child in her arms.

"'There were little children at the window,' Peggy went on, disengaging herself from the embrace, that she might observe her mother's face while she told her story; 'and they tapped on the glass when they saw her standing on the step. I think they were glad to see her come home. I wish you had a shawl like hers, poor mammy,' the child added, wistfully; 'how nice and warm you'd be. Do you think I shall ever see my kind lady again, mammy?'

"'Maybe you will, dearie, if you are passing that way another time. Would you know her again, Peggy?'

"'Oh yes, mammy! I don't see so many smart ladies with kind faces, that I should forget this one. What's the kindest face you've ever seen, mammy?'

"'The sweetest face I've ever seen,' answered

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her mother, 'next to yours, my lamb, was my young mistress's. It's a face I shall always remember, though it's many years now since I've seen it. The faces I see round me now,' she continued, as her thoughts roamed over the inhabitants of the court and neighbouring alleys, 'are very, very different. Her face was so gentle and so kind—like you describe your lady's to be.'

"'It couldn't be kinder or gentler, mammy.'

"'Couldn't it, my lamb? Very well, I won't say it could; but I think you would have loved my mistress, Peggy; and she would have loved you. I have often longed to show you to her. You are very like what I used to be, before sickness and sorrow made me the poor, thin thing I am; and I think——'

"'You're not a poor, thin thing, mammy, interrupted Peggy, vehemently; 'you're very pretty. I heard the doctor say last week, as he went out of the room, "How pretty she must have been!"'

"'Did you, dearie?' said her mother, smiling. 'Well! so I have heard it said in the old days long ago; and no one thought so more than

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my young mistress. "'Oh, Mary," she'd say to me sometimes, "I wish you'd give me your pretty bright hair, and take my dull, dark stuff instead!" For she'd very dark hair, Peggy.'

"'So has my lady!' put in Peggy.

"'And she loved my face, too,' the woman went on; 'for she said I always looked so happy and smiling. I wonder what she'd say now!' and the invalid sighed. 'Well, Peggy, I left her when I married your father, and she married soon after herself; so I have never seen her again.'

"'Was she tall?' asked Peggy.

"'Yes; tall and slim, and held her head like a queen.'

"'Oh, mammy!' said Peggy, 'I do believe she's very like my lady. *Could* it be the same, d'ye think?'

"'It's not very likely, dearie; but it just might be. I thought when you told me she looked so at you, that it might be you reminded her of me. But it's only a fancy, Peggy; for I believe her home is in the country. Your hair and your face are so like what mine were, that if it was her, she couldn't

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but be struck with the likeness. It's too good to be true, dearie, so we won't think anything more about it.'

"'You weren't so poor when you first married father, were you?' asked Peggy.

"'Oh, no, Peggy; we were very comfortable then, and until some time after you were born. Father had plenty of work, and I took in washing, or made shirts; so we got along very well.'

"'And used daddy not to be thirsty then?" asked the child.

"'A little, always, dearie; but not so thirsty as he is now.'

"'He got thirstier and thirstier every day, I s'pose,' Peggy went on to herself, 'till at last he spent all the money on drink, and now he's obliged to pawn the tables and chairs. It's 'cause he spends the money on drink that we're so poor, mammy, isn't it?'

"'Not altogether, Peggy. You see some of it is my fault. I used to make a good deal before I got ill; but now I can't work a bit, or help at all. Washing I've no strength for, and I can't do needlework for long at a time.'

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"'Mammy,' said the child, 'I wish you'd tell me about the time when I was a baby, and you were well, and we had lots to eat, and plenty of coals. It must have been so nice,' she went on, drawing up her little bare feet under the bed-clothes, and looking wistfully at the empty grate.

"'Are you cold, my lamb?' asked the mother.

"'A little,' said Peggy, rather pitifully; 'but more hungry than cold.'

"The sick woman raised herself in bed with some difficulty, and looked round the room.

"'I fancied there was a crust of bread somewhere,' she said, 'that I put by for you. Go and look behind the pitcher, dearie.'

"Peggy jumped down from the bed, and, after some hunting, discovered a stale old hunch of bread, with which she returned in triumph.

"'I'm afraid it's very hard, aint it? I wish there was a drop of milk you could soak it in. Why, Peggy, what's the matter? Have you bitten your tongue?'

"For at the mention of the milk, Peggy gave a sort of scream.

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"'Why! the milk, mammy! the milk that I was going to buy for you with my threepenny bit! I've forgotten all about it; and you're so thirsty. Oh, dear! oh, dear!' And the little girl snatched up the mug, and hurried to the door.

"'Come back, Peggy,' said the sick woman, faintly.

"The little creature was quivering with impatience to be off; but at the sound of the call, she came to the bedside.

"'Don't keep me, mammy; the shop will be shut up.'

"'Don't go, dearie,' said her mother, throwing her arms round the child's neck. 'I can't let you go, my lamb.'

"'Why not, mammy?' asked the child, very much surprised.

"'It's so late, dearie, and so dark. I can't let you go. Suppose some harm were to happen to you!'

"Peggy looked unfeignedly astonished.

"Early and late was she accustomed to roam about by herself; and she could not account for her mother's unusual agitation.

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"'I won't be a minute, mammy. I'll run all the way.'

"'Widow Payne's little girl was run over only last week,' said the mother, shuddering. 'I can't let you go, Peggy.'

"'But, mammy dear, there's no crossings the way I'm going.'

"'I can't spare you, indeed, dearie; I can't let you go.'

"The child put the mug down on the floor, and looked rather discomfited.

"'What will you do all night without the milk, mammy?'

"'Maybe there's a little drop still at the bottom of the mug; and if you put some water to it, it will make it more.'

"Peggy fetched the cracked pitcher from the other side of the room, and carefully poured a little drop into the mug.

"'It's made more,' she exclaimed, exultingly, as she brought the miserable liquid to the bedside.

"The sick woman drank it eagerly, draining the mug to the very dregs. 'That's nice!' she said, as she sank back on the pillow.

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"'You'd better let me get some more,' said Peggy, wistfully.

"'By-and-by you shall, dearie; but I can't spare you yet. You're cold, and I want you to come into bed and get warm. After that, you shall get the milk and some bread, and we'll have a little feast together. Won't that do, Peggy? Why do you look so sad? What is it, my child? Tell mammy what ails you.'

"Peggy answered timidly, and looking down, as if she knew she was treading on dangerous ground, 'I'm so afraid of Daddy coming home, and taking my money away from me.'

"The drunkard's wife did not answer for a minute, and then she said, quietly, 'I promise you, you shall go and spend it before he comes home. And now, come and get warm.'

"Peggy scrambled up on the bed again, holding me tight in one hand, and the hunch of bread in the other.

"She nestled close up to her mother, who warmed her little cold feet, and drew the scanty covering over her.

"'Are you warm now, my lambie?'

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"'*So* warm!' said Peggy, nestling closer, and nibbling her hard crust with great contentment; 'it would be nice to be always in bed, now the winter's come.'

"'You would soon tire of it, dearie, and want to be running about in the streets. It is weary work lying here with nothing to do.'

"'Have you finished the shirts, mammy?'

"'I sewed on the buttons of one to-day, and that's all I could do. You shall take it to the baker's wife when you go out, and tell her I'll finish the other as quick as I can. Maybe she'll pay for the first one at once, without waiting for the second; for she's a kind woman, though rough.'

"'To think,' the invalid added, half to herself, 'that it should take me all day to sew a few buttons on a shirt, when I used to make a whole one in the same time.'

"'You see, Peggy, it's the cough,' she went on to the child; 'it is cold sitting up in bed without any shawl to put over my shoulders, and brings on the cough directly—so bad, that I'm obliged to lie down again.'

"'Shawl's pawned, aint it?' said Peggy, as

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she regretfully put the last bit of bread into her mouth.

"'Many weeks ago,' sighed her mother. 'I was loath to part with it for two reasons. First, because it was my mistress's wedding present to me. She was going to be married herself, as I told you, and had had a beautiful Indian shawl given her. She was showing me her presents, all laid out in the room; and when we came to the shawl, she said, "Now, Mary, I am going to give you a French shawl, as near like this Indian one of mine as can be, and you must always think of me when you wear it."'

"'And, sure enough, it *was* very like when it came, for they imitate the patterns first-rate now. It was a lovely shawl, as you must remember, Peggy, and I never thought to have parted with it; but it had to go with the rest.'

"'And what was the other reason?' asked Peggy.

"'The other reason,' said the poor woman, with a sort of sob, 'was, that it was the last thing that touched your little baby brother. He was always wrapped in that shawl; it seemed to be the only thing that kept him

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warm all through his illness. I never could look at it after without thinking of him. But now even that last recollection is gone.'

"'Don't cry, mammy,' pleaded Peggy; 'please, don't cry!'

"'I can't, Peggy; I can't cry for him. How could I wish him back? He's a happy little angel now, and never can be cold any more. Ah! you can't remember him, dearie; for it's two years ago and more, and you were so young yourself. Nor little Moll neither, who died at the same time, and who was but a year or so younger than you. It was a terrible hard winter, and daddy had had no work; so you children had been poorly fed and clothed all through the cold weather. Then when the fever came, you could none of you make any fight against it. You, Peggy, were the worst of all, and for many nights I thought I was going to lose you; but you threw it off the soonest of the three. Moll didn't have it so bad, and was getting better, as we thought; but she never got properly fed up and nourished as she ought, and so she faded away day by day. Baby was so young, we thought he

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wouldn't take it; but it got hold of him for all that, and we buried them both the same day.

"'It seemed hard, then, Peggy, to hide away their little faces in the grave, and to think I should never hear their little voices again; but now, when I see how cold and hungry my one lamb is sometimes, I can't be sorry there are not three mouths to fill, and three little bodies to clothe. And I say to myself, "Peggy is cold and hungry here; but Moll and Baby are safe and warm in heaven." But I have to say it very often,' concluded the mother, with a sudden burst of tears; 'for sometimes I want my babies very badly.'

"'Don't cry, mammy,' pleaded Peggy again; 'you mustn't cry.'

"A sound at the door was now heard, and the little girl started up in terror.

"'Oh! mammy, here's father!'

"They both listened for a few minutes; but the sound was not repeated.

"'It's only the rats, I dare say,' said Mrs. Gould; 'I hear them often when I'm lying here by myself. Perhaps you had better go now,

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though, in case he should come home. Take care of yourself, my lamb, and come back quickly.'

"Peggy took another look at me to see if I was quite safe, scrambled down from the bed, and picked up the mug from the floor.

"'Good-bye, mammy; I won't be long.'

"The mother raised herself in bed, and held out her arms.

"'Kiss me, my child, before you go.'

"Peggy was half-way across the room; but she ran back, laughing, at the call. She lifted up her sunny little face to be kissed, and said—

"'*What* a feast we'll have when I come back! Milk! bread! *perhaps* a little bit of cheese; and all with my threepenny bit.'

"But the mother threw her arms round the child, and strained her close.

"'God in heaven watch over my child!'

"Peggy gently disengaged herself, and squeezed one of her mother's hands in both of hers.

"'Mammy, why do you seem so frightened at letting me go?'

"'I don't know, dearie, how it is; but I

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want you with me so much to-night. Promise not to loiter about, Peggy, looking at the shops, or playing with the children, but come back to me quickly. Promise;' and she waited eagerly for the answer.

"'I promise, mammy,' said the little girl, 'I won't stop to listen to a barrel-organ; no, nor not even to look at Punch! So there, mammy!'

"'Thank you, dearie; you're my own good little Peggy, and I know you'll keep your word. Kiss me again; and now, go.'

"Peggy gave her many kisses, and then took up the shirt, and marched off with a very important step. When she got to the door, she turned round again—

"'Lie down, dear mammy; you'll be so cold.'

"For the mother was still sitting up in bed, straining her eyes after the little figure.

"At the sound of Peggy's voice, she sank back on the pillow.

"'Good-bye mammy,' rang out the merry voice again, 'you'll hardly have time to say "Jack Robinson" before I shall be back again.' And then the child took herself and her sun-

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shine out of the room together, leaving the mother alone in a twofold darkness.

CHAPTER IV.

"PEGGY set off at her usual pace as soon as she got into the streets. The pavement was more sloppy than ever. There was a drizzling rain, and the cold east wind met her at every corner; but, for all that, she danced merrily on, singing her usual song:

> "'Oh! what fun,
> To have a plum bun!
> How I wish it never was done!'

"The passers-by in the streets looked cold and wretched: the men had all got their hands deep in their pockets to keep them warm, and the women huddled their scanty shawls as closely round them as possible.

"Even Peggy was discomposed at last, for a sudden gust of wind nearly blew off her sun-bonnet, and cut quite through her little cotton frock.

"'Whew!' said Peggy.

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"The room at home seemed quite comfortable compared to this. And she hurried on quicker than ever, that she might get back there the sooner.

"She could not help, however, pulling up before a pawnbroker's shop, lit by a flaring jet of gas, which showed to great advantage the dirty old gowns and shawls suspended there.

"Peggy gazed admiringly at them. 'How lovely!' she said, half out loud. 'How warm!' she added, with a little shiver. 'I do believe that is mother's own shawl behind there. Oh! if I could only get it out of pawn! I wish my threepenny was bigger, and could do that, besides buying the milk and bread. But it's so small, it can't do much.'

"She opened her hand, and looked at me.

"'Yes, it's very small,' she repeated, with a sigh. 'I know it's no use. I wish I could meet my kind lady again—I'm sure *she'd* give mammy a shawl, if she knew how cold she is, sitting up in bed making shirts. How warm and nice her own shawl was! Oh, dear! oh, dear! I wonder why some people are so cold, and other people so warm and comfortable!

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Mammy says God knows best, and that we'll all be warm and comfortable in heaven. I wonder if Moll and Baby are sorry Mammy and Peggy are so cold and hungry.'

"And Peggy raised her eyes to the sky above, and watched a few stars that were trying to peep down through the clouds.

"'Are you sorry, Moll and Baby?' she whispered.

"But her little meditation was rudely interrupted by a drunken man, who stumbled up against her, and muttered an angry exclamation as the shock nearly sent him into the gutter.

"Peggy turned and fled.

"'It was father!' she exclaimed, squeezing me tighter than ever. 'What a mercy he didn't see it was me!'

"She looked behind her for a minute, and then drew back under an archway, as she watched the staggering figure.

"He came reeling on, past the very place where the child was concealed, and then went on to the end of the street, where he turned into a small public-house.

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"Then Peggy came out of her hiding-place, and gave a sigh of relief.

"'If he'd seen me, he'd have been sure to take my money.'

"Her way lay past the public-house, and as she neared it she squeezed me tighter than ever. She stopped for a minute before she reached the door, to make quite sure he was safe inside. The door was shut, and there was no one about.

"'Now, then,' she said to herself.

"Noisy songs and harsh voices proceeded from within, and the child's feet hardly touched the ground as she flew past.

"She never stopped till she reached the baker's shop, where she was to deliver up the shirt.

"She was very much out of breath, and gave out her message in gasps.

"'Please, ma'am,' she said, standing on tiptoe, and unconsciously putting the shirt on the counter right into the middle of a dish of jam puffs, 'Mother finished the shirt, and here it is.'

"I suppose it was a little trying to see dirty

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work in the pastry; for the woman, who Mrs. Gould had described as 'kind, though rough,' snatched it up angrily, and scolded Peggy vehemently for some minutes.

"She was certainly rough to look upon. Her arms, hands, and hair were all white with flour; the buttons on her gown had disappeared, and were replaced by white pins; and her face was tied up with a bit of old flannel.

"In the midst of the storm, another customer came in, so her attention was diverted from Peggy.

"The child waited very patiently; but as customer after customer came in, and the woman took no further notice of her, she began to fidget about uneasily.

"She was so low down in front of the counter, that the chances were the shopwoman did not see her, and had forgotten she was there.

"Peggy began to wonder what she could do to attract her attention.

"First she began stamping her heel on the floor; but as she had not got any boots on, no very great results followed.

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"Then she scratched the counter with her nails; but that failed also. The woman's voice was so loud that it drowned all minor sounds.

"Peggy debated in her own mind whether she would pull a loaf off the counter, as if by accident; but on second thoughts she was not sure whether that would be quite the best method of securing the woman's good-will: so she gave it up.

"Fate, however, came to her assistance. The last customer who went out left the door open, and the keen east wind struck against the shopwoman's tied-up cheek. Muttering an impatient exclamation, she came round from behind the counter to shut the door, and so discovered the small child, standing so quietly in the corner.

"'Lor!' she exclaimed, 'how you startled me! What are you waiting for, child?'

"Peggy summoned up all her courage, and said, 'I thought you were going to pay for it.'

"'Pay for it!' said the woman, sharply; 'why I gave two to be made; I'm not going to pay till I get 'em both back.'

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"'Mother's ill,' said Peggy, 'and can't work much at a time.'

"'Why does she ask for work, then, eh?' questioned the rough voice. 'If she can't do it, let her send it back, and I'll give it to some one else.'

"'Oh, no!' said Peggy, alarmed, and making her way out speedily; 'it does not matter about paying. She'll finish the other soon, and I'll bring it directly it's done.'

"'Here!' the baker's wife called after her; 'tell her I'll be round to-morrow, to see how she's getting on, and I'll bring the money myself.'

"'Thank you, ma'am,' said Peggy; and she went out of the shop, shutting the door very carefully behind her.

"The wind was more cutting than ever, and Peggy gave a little sigh. She was disappointed about the money, and sorry to have been kept waiting so long; for she knew her mother must be expecting her every moment. But a look at me consoled her. 'Now for the milk,' she said, 'and now for the bread. What a feast mammy and I will have!' Off she went

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again, singing and dancing; and, in her joy at the thoughts of getting home with the food, utterly oblivious of the fact that she was getting nearer and nearer to the public-house.

"Singing and dancing, the unconscious child came along the dark street. Singing and dancing, she came right in front of the door.

"Then, at the sound of the drunken revels from within, she suddenly remembered her former fears, and stopped short in her song.

"But it was too late.

"The flare of the gas shone full on her little face; and a man, who had been leaning against the lamp-post in front of the door, reeled forward, and touched her on the shoulder."

CHAPTER V.

"PEGGY'S first impulse was to scream; but she restrained herself, and only squeezed me tighter than ever.

"Her father asked her, in a thick tone, where she had been.

"'I've been to take the shirts to the baker's

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shop,' she answered, trembling; 'and now I'm going home to mother.'

"The man was too tipsy to understand much of what the child said; but he caught at the idea of the shirts, and asked how much had been paid for them.

"'She didn't pay, daddy,' said the little girl, her heart beating quickly.

"But the very mention of money made her so nervous that she struggled to get away from his detaining grasp. This roused his suspicions, and, tightening his hold upon her shoulder, he asked her why she was in such a hurry?

"'Oh, father!' burst out poor little Peggy, 'please let me go. Mammy's so thirsty with her cough, and I'm going to buy her some milk.'

"The word 'thirsty' recalled to the drunkard his own insatiable desires; and the idea of buying milk suggested that the child was deceiving him as to the shirts having been paid for. It became evident to him that she had some money about her, and he gave utterance to a husky sentence, in which 'Give the money to me' was distinctly heard.

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"Poor little Peggy's face showed that she had become aware of the mistake she had made. She looked guilty, scared, and nervous all at once. She looked up the street and down the street, as if for assistance; but there was no one about: the east wind had driven home all those who had homes to go to; and the child felt she must depend upon herself, or give up everything for lost.

"She made another little effort to shake off his hand, knowing that if she could once have run away, he would never be able to overtake her. But he was prepared for this, and held her tighter than ever.

"The drunkard chuckled at his own sharpness, and, peering down into the guilty little face, repeated, 'Where—'s mon—ey?'

"Peggy made no answer, only her head drooped lower and lower.

"After repeating the question in vain two or three times, he got provoked, and rather roughly lifted up her face by putting his hand under her chin.

"A very determined little countenance was thus brought to light. The round mouth was

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firmly set, as if the teeth within were clenched; and I am sure Peggy was prepared to endure any amount of rough treatment sooner than give up the money that was to do so much for her mother.

"Suddenly her father's eye fell on her closed hand, and making a dart at it, he inquired, 'What—got—in—hand?'

"Quick as lightning, Peggy slipped me into her left hand, and held out an empty palm, without saying a word.

"'Now, th'other,' he said.

"The same operation was repeated, and the left hand proved as empty as the right. He was quite puzzled now, and seemed inclined to give it up and let her go. Already was hope dawning in Peggy's heart, and her bright eyes were fixed on his face, expecting her dismissal every moment. Her feet were quivering, in their eagerness to start, and something almost like her own smile was beginning to pass over her features, as she felt the hand on her shoulder relax its grasp.

"But the sunny smile her mother so delighted in was in this case her bane; for it

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roused once more her father's suspicions, and he suddenly caught hold of both her hands in his, and began to unclasp her fingers. Fear lent the child strength, and she kept her little fingers over me with a grasp of iron.

"The pair were pretty evenly matched; for despair and love made the child strong, and the drunkard's fingers were nerveless and weak.

"It was a curious sight: the drunken man swaying about as he strove with his little opponent; and the small child, white with fear, standing so erect and firm, her little hands tightly clasped together, and her bright eyes fixed upon his face.

"She winced once or twice as he pulled her fingers rather roughly; but, for all that, no word, no cry, escaped from her lips. She was fighting for her mother, and love made her brave.

"How long the struggle would have lasted I cannot say, but the drunkard got angry at last, and directing all his force against the little finger of her left hand, succeeded in unclasping it; the other fingers, of course, relaxed a little, and, pursuing his advantage, he wrenched me

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out of her hand before she could close them over me again.

"And now poor little Peggy's calmness and forbearance completely deserted her. Her face became inflamed with passion.

"'Give it me back,' she screamed, as she danced with rage before him; 'it's mine—it's my very own. You've no business to take it!'

"The drunkard leant against the gas-lamp, and watched her with a smile of great amusement.

"'Give it me back, I say!' shrieked Peggy. 'I *will* have it! I *will* have it!'

"The empty street gave back the echo of her passionate cries; and the drunkard laughed huskily, and feebly clapped his hands.

"'Bravo!' he said. 'En-cor!'

"This increased Peggy's rage, and she danced like a mad thing before him. She took hold of a bit of his coat, and shook it with all her might.

"'You're very, *very* wicked,' she cried; 'and I can't bear you.'

"They were the very words she had used to

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her mother in speaking of him a few hours before; and even as she said them, the child remembered it—remembered also, I am sure, the reproachful look and reproving 'Peggy!' with which they had been received—remembered, perhaps, how patiently and gently *she* bore with her many sorrows and privations.

"Remembered, too, that she was lying in darkness and solitude, waiting for the nourishment that would never now arrive.

"And as these divers recollections swept over her, the child's passion subsided, and her angry tears changed to tears of sorrow and remorse: sorrow, at the thought of the long night her mother would have to pass, racked by the cough, which she would not have a drop of anything to soothe; remorse, at her own rebellious conduct. What would her mother say could she see her child raging there at her father! What would she say had she heard the storm of angry, bitter words! Poor little Peggy! she was exhausted with the struggle and the passion, faint for want of food, and trembling all over with cold; and she leant her weary head against the lamp-post, and raising her

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eyes to the sky above, wished she was safe and warm up there with Baby and little Moll.

"Presently her father moved, and began staggering towards the public-house.

"At this sight Peggy made one last desperate effort to save her money. 'Daddy,' she entreated, putting herself between him and the door, 'don't spend it!—oh, please don't spend it!'

"'Get out!' said the drunkard.

"'Mother's so bad with her cough,' she sobbed, clinging to him. 'Oh, give me the money, dear Daddy, and let me go!'

"The cold east wind came rushing up the street as she spoke, and the child shivered all over.

"'It cuts right through the broken window, Daddy, and makes her cough as if she would break to pieces. She's nothing to eat or drink, and hardly anything to cover her. She's miserable enough without the cough, and a drop of milk will ease her a little. Oh, don't send me home without it, Daddy! Daddy, please don't!'

"Again the cold wind came sweeping up the

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street, cutting so keenly that even the drunkard felt it, and drew his coat tighter round him. I believe he was half hesitating; I believe the voice of his little daughter had reached him through all the drowsiness and mistiness of drink. But at that very moment the door of the public-house opened, and the light from within streamed out into the cold, damp street; it reached out as far as the lamp-post, and shed a glow for a moment on the figure of the drunkard and the child kneeling at his feet. The contrast was too much for his powers of resisting temptation, and, raising Peggy from the ground, he tried to lead her forward. 'Come in,' he said, not unkindly; 'good fire; come, get warm.'

"So she followed him into the public-house—into the noise, and the smoke, and the revelry—and stood by him while he called for spirits. She cried no more, she strove no more. Only once, when he held me out as payment, she said, 'It's mine, daddy—it's my very own,' and followed me with her eyes with such a wistful expression that even the publican noticed it as he laid me down on the counter. But when her

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father held his glass to her lips, and told her to drink, she turned indignantly away, and moved towards the fire at the end of the room, pursued by the shouts of laughter which the incident had occasioned.

"She did not know how cold she was, nor how worn out, till she sat down by the blazing fire. There was an old arm-chair in the chimney corner, with a faded cushion in the seat. Peggy pulled it down, and, putting her head on it, curled herself round on the ground, so that her little naked feet rested on the fender.

"Then, hiding her face in her hands, she sobbed as if her heart would break. All hope was over: her threepenny was gone—gone for ever!

"But the warmth was very soothing, and Peggy was very tired. She spread out her little toes to the blaze, and somehow felt comforted. Things did not seem quite so bad as they had done in the street. She even began to speculate on the possibility of meeting the kind lady again, and getting another threepenny bit, and then of the probability of the shirts being paid.

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for the next day. Lying there by the fire, staring at the red-hot coals, all sorts of ways and means of finding money passed through the child's mind.

"'I must go home now,' she said to herself two or three times, but still she did not move.

"'I'll go directly I'm warm,' she said again; 'mother will be waiting.' But the minutes passed on, and still found Peggy lying by the fire, staring at the coals.

"'I must just wait and see if that great red cavern will hold together or not,' she said, 'and then I really will go. Yes. No. Yes. No. I knew that would happen,' Peggy said, half out loud, as it all fell through together, and a bright flame burst out. The flame spread and spread, till it reached a black coal just at the edge of the bars; and fiz! such a blue flame shot up.

"'Lots of gas in the coal,' remarked Peggy, with great satisfaction; for she remembered hearing her mother say so once, when the coal in her own scanty fire at home had done the same thing.

"The flame turned presently into a long line

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of blue smoke, which came curling up outside the bars.

"Peggy wondered dreamingly if it was at all dangerous, and said to herself confidentially—

"'I will watch it very carefully.' So she tried to keep her eyes fixed on it, but kept on finding she had got them shut.

"'I must really watch it,' she repeated, opening them very wide, 'in case the house should be set on fire.'

"'I could run for a fire-engine, you know,' she murmured; but her voice sounded a long way off. So did all the other voices in the public-house.

"When she had first come in there had been a great deal of noise going on—many voices, much talking, singing, laughing, quarrelling.

"It had frightened even her a little, accustomed as she was to such sounds. But now it seemed all so far away and indistinct, that it sounded quite pretty. There seemed to be no more quarrelling or talking—only singing, and that got softer every minute. All round and about her was getting dim. How was it? The public-house was changing into the room

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at home, only the bright fire was burning in the little grate, and the blue smoke curling up outside the bars there, till it filled all the room. But for all that, Peggy could see her mother lying on the bed in the corner. She ran to her, and told her all her troubles, and her mother smiled, and said—

"'A little water will do just as well;' and she drank out of the old cracked pitcher, and seemed to get quite well. And the singing grew softer and softer. Then kind faces hovered over Peggy; white hands held out threepenny pieces; while soft voices said, 'Here, little girl, take this,'—only they seemed to sing it to the tune of the beautiful music. Presently two little heads looked down, smiling, and two baby voices sang, 'Moll and Baby are safe and warm in heaven.' Peggy knew it was Baby, because he was wrapped in the warm shawl she remembered so well.

"Then she tried to ask them in the same tune, 'Are Moll and Baby sorry that Peggy and Mammy are so cold and hungry?' But she could not, for she did not know the tune.

"They smiled, however, and kissed their

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little hands; and the music went on, and everything was warm, and bright, and beautiful.

"All this Peggy seemed to hear and see as she rested in the chimney corner.

"But the other people in the public-house saw nothing but a weary little child lying fast asleep before the blazing fire."

CHAPTER VI.

"Boom! Boom! Boom!

"All the clocks in the neighbourhood were striking a quarter to twelve. The public-house began to empty itself; one by one those who were pretty sober dropped out. Some were so drunk that they did not seem inclined to move at all, and of these last was Peggy's father.

"He was obliged to stagger up at last, however, for the publican got impatient, and it was getting on for twelve. But he could not stand by himself; so two others, a little more sober, supported him, one on each side, and so got him out.

"The public-house was now cleared, and the publican shut the doors, put up the shutters,

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and turned off the gas. By the light of the fire he began putting the place to rights. He picked up the chairs that had been thrown down, and put them against the wall, gathered together the bits of broken glass and old pipes, and made a little heap of them on the counter.

"I had my eye on him all the while, for I was wondering what he would do when he found his uninvited guest. He was an old man, with grisly hair, and deep lines all over his face; he looked very poor, for his coat was ragged and his boots full of holes. He talked to himself as he moved about the room. 'I must rake out the fire,' he said to himself; 'it'll never do to waste all that coal.'

"He moved towards the fire-place as he spoke, and the room being nearly dark he did not perceive something lying before it. He stumbled over it, and nearly fell into the grate. He uttered an angry exclamation, and began peering about to discover what it was; but the fire had subsided into a red glow, and gave no light at all. He stooped down and began feeling with his hand. It struck against something soft and warm, and he started up. 'It's

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one of them drunken brutes, I do believe,' he said, angrily, 'and how am I ever to turn him out by myself? I must get a light and see if it's a little 'un or a big 'un, and then holloa to a policeman to come in and help me get rid of him.'

"He groped his way out, and presently returned with a tallow dip in his hand, which he stuck into the fire, and, after some spluttering, managed to light.

"'Now, my fine fellow,' said he; and stooping down, he threw the light of the candle on the sleeping form. There lay little Peggy, with her head pillowed on the cushion she had pulled from the seat of the chair; one little hand hugged the pillow tight, and the other was hidden beneath it; her tiny naked feet rested on the fender, as if even in dreams they craved for the warmth they had so sorely needed when first she laid them there. There was something in the intense repose of both face and attitude that told its own tale; told how very weary the little limbs had been ere they found this resting-place; told how very sad the little face had been ere it attained its present tranquillity; told, at

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TIMOTHY'S UNINVITED GUEST. *Page* 64.

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a glance, of weariness and sorrow, suddenly overtaken and lost in the repose and forgetfulness of sleep.

"For there were traces of tears on the calm little face, and the regular breathing was every now and then interrupted by that sort of sobbing sigh which is usual to children after a violent fit of crying.

"The publican remained stooping over her for some time; and when he raised himself up, he did it very quietly indeed.

"'I can't turn the little 'un out to-night,' he muttered; 'it's cold and dark. And yet——' He stooped over her again. 'It's Gould's little 'un, I s'pose,' he went on. 'I mind his bringing it in, and the way it looked at him when he spent his last bit of silver. By the way,' he added, turning to the counter, 'I've never put it by.'

"He turned round, as if coming towards me, and then went back to the child.

"'I can't have all the beggars in the streets a-sleeping here, yer know,' he said, as if expostulating with some one. 'What's the brat to me?'

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"He paused, as if waiting for an answer; but none came save the ticking of the clock, and Peggy's regular breathing.

"'I wish *I* could sleep like that,' he sighed, as he looked at her again. 'Ah, me! Ah, me! Timothy Craig, it's many years since *you*'ve slept as peaceful-like. Pity to disturb her while she *can* sleep so.'

"He put the candle closer, and then shaded it carefully with his hand, as the child began to stir in her slumbers.

"'Never fear, little 'un, I'll not wake yer; you shall sleep quiet *this* night, at any rate.'

"He took up the poker to rake out the fire, and then stopped.

"'I'll leave the fire for to-night,' he muttered; 'the little 'un 'ud be terrible cold if it went out ——And yet it's a pity to leave so many coals not burnt out. What's the brat to me, after all?'—and he seized the poker.

"Peggy again stirred in her sleep, and once more he paused, irresolute.

"'Nonsense!' he muttered, angrily. 'Why should I care whether she's warm or not? Most folks 'ud have turned her out at once

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into the streets. Why should I waste my coal?'

"He waited for an answer, as before.

"This time it came, in the confused tones of a child talking in its sleep—

"'Daddy, daddy!' And Peggy, as she spoke, moved uneasily on her pillow.

"The words seemed to touch some deep chord in his heart, and to bring before him some far-off recollection. For a moment his face was wonderfully softened, and then it changed into an expression of anger and excitement.

"'I tell yer,' he said, as if again arguing with his invisible opponent, 'that I'm not going to be made a fool of like this. Don't I know them? Didn't my gal say "Daddy" in a little voice like that, when she was a child of that age? My gal, who's rich now, and never cares to see or hear of her father; no, not when he's been starving! It's no use,' he went on, shaking his fist at the unconscious Peggy, 'you'll be as cruel and as bad as the rest some day, for all yer soft little voice, and yer "Daddy, daddy!" You don't come over me like this, —d'ye hear?'

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"And he waited again for his answer

"The angry voice must have recalled to the sleeping child her late interview with her father, and brought back the attendant train of circumstances; for she moaned in her sleep, and repeated—

"'Daddy, please don't.'

"The little voice was so hopeless and appealing, that it reached again the hidden chord in the publican's heart, and he knelt down and whispered soothingly—

"'No—no—no, dearie, I won't.'

"The little sleeper was calmed for the moment; but directly he moved, she burst out again—

"'Daddy, please don't.'

"'Don't what?' whispered the publican, bending over her.

"'Don't spend it,' said Peggy, with a sobbing sigh.

"Closer and closer he bent, till his lips almost touched her cheek; and gently he repeated—

"'No—no—no, dearie, I won't.'

"Whether the answer penetrated through the

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mists and shadows of sleep, I know not; but the child stirred no more. But long after she was wrapped in her peaceful slumber did the old man remain with his cheek against hers, dreamily repeating—

"'No—no—no, dearie, I won't.'

"'I won't, neither,' he added, when he had satisfied himself she was really off; and as he spoke he rose cautiously, and crept on tiptoe to the counter, where he picked me up, and stealthily returning to his post, slipped me into one of her little hands.

"'She'll find it there when she wakes,' he observed, as he watched the little fingers instinctively close over me.

"'Please don't,' said Peggy, again; and again came the soothing answer, 'No—no—no, dearie, I won't.'

"'Poor little legs!' he said, 'they'll be cold when the fire goes out, for the frock's too short to cover them.'

"He hesitated a minute, as if again struggling to free himself from the tender feelings that had come over him. And then he gave himself up to them altogether, and

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taking off his threadbare coat, he spread it over the child's limbs with the care and gentleness of a woman.

"Then he picked up his candle, and stole quietly away, and as he slowly mounted the creaky staircase I could hear him repeating to himself, over and over again, the child's pitiful entreaty, 'Daddy, please don't—daddy, please don't!' And his own soothing answer, 'No—no—no, dearie, I won't!'

"Boom! Boom! Boom! All the clocks in the neighbourhood were striking twelve.

"Softly fell the chimes on the ear of the sleeping Peggy, and mingled with the music of her dream.

"Discordantly they rang in the ears of the drunken father as he staggered along the wet streets.

"Despairingly they sounded on the ear of the suffering mother, as she waited in vain for her child's return.

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CHAPTER VII.

"I PASSED a very quiet night in Peggy's little warm hand. I don't think the child stirred once after the publican was gone.

"The fire went out towards daybreak; but she was so well covered up in the old coat that the change of atmosphere did not affect her.

"She slept soundly on till long after sounds in the street outside told me that another day had begun.

"It was almost the only indication that such was the case, for very little light found its way into the room on that dull, foggy morning. I heard the publican overhead moving about, and then descend the creaky staircase step by step.

"He paused outside the door, opened it carefully, and peeped in. He was all dressed but his coat, and looked cold in his shirt-sleeves.

"He had evidently come to fetch it, but, seeing the child still wrapped in slumber, he did not disturb her.

"'Couldn't take it away, you know,' he observed, apologetically, as he moved to the counter and began setting out the glasses.

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'Cold, too,' he added, drawing his thin shoulders closer together.

"He got some paper and some wood, relighted the fire, and turned on the gas.

"Even the crackling and popping of the wood did not awake Peggy. She slept quietly on. The publican came and looked at her, and then went about his morning avocations. He got out a teapot with a broken spout, which he placed on a table with three legs; produced from a cupboard a hunch of bread and a bit of fat bacon, also a cup with no handle, and a saucer with a great crack in it.

"'We'll have our breakfast together anyways,' I heard him remark. 'The little 'un can drink out of the saucer, and I'll drink out of the cup.'

"He fetched a kettle, and filled it out of a water-jug that stood by the door.

"Meanwhile the fire crackled merrily on, diffusing warmth and comfort through the whole room.

"And so it came to pass that when Peggy awoke the fire was as red and hot as it had been when she fell asleep the night before;

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nay, there was the very cavern she had watched so attentively, or one so like it that it might easily have been taken for it; the gas was flaring as before, and there was no sign of daylight.

"The publican was just coming to put the kettle on when the child began to show signs of waking, and he drew back behind the door that he might watch her.

"When first she opened her eyes, she turned round, and said 'Mammy,' but the red-hot cavern being straight in front of her she started up and looked puzzled. The fire and the gas looked just the same, and as she remembered where she was, and what had brought her there, she gave a deep sigh, and sank back on her cushion.

"'I must really go home,' she said. 'I'm quite warm now, and mammy will be waiting.'

"What was it that made her suddenly start and open her little hand? What made the bright eyes grow rounder and rounder? Was she dreaming? Or was it really and truly her threepenny-bit that she thought was lost to her for ever?

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"Vague fancies of having lately seen hands holding out threepenny-bits, floated through her mind. Had she been asleep? Was she still asleep? Peggy rubbed her eyes and shook her head to see if she was in a dream. But no, there it was—a real, true threepenny-bit. There could be no mistake about it. And Peggy pressed the little coin to her lips, and hugged it close up to her, exclaiming as she did so, 'It's come back — it's come back to me! Peggy's own—Peggy's very—very own!'

"The publican, standing watching her from behind the door, gave an involuntary chuckle at the sight of her unfeigned delight.

"The sound startled Peggy, and she turned her head round. An expression of great astonishment came over her face. Where was her father? Where were all the noisy men who had been drinking together? All gone! The room was empty—positively empty! Not a voice—not a sound!

"Peggy looked utterly bewildered. Her eyes wandered all round the room, and she saw how different it looked in spite of the gas and the fire.

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"The chairs were put neatly against the wall, the glasses in order on the counter, and there was a little breakfast laid out on the three-legged table.

"'Oh, what does it all mean?' said Peggy, out loud. 'Is there nobody in the world alive but me and my threepenny-bit?'

"And now she perceived, too, that she was carefully covered up in an old coat, and was more puzzled than ever.

"She got up from the ground and examined it attentively. 'It's not Daddy's, it's too fine for that; how kind of somebody to wrap me up!' Another involuntary chuckle escaped from the old man behind the door. 'Well, I don't understand it,' said Peggy, half sighing, 'and it frightens me rather; I'll run home as fast as ever I can.'

"'No, no, dearie, don't yer, don't!' And the publican, as he spoke, advanced into the room, and stood in his shirt-sleeves, kettle in hand, before the astonished child.

"Peggy was already very uncertain whether she was asleep or awake, and the sight of the

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weird figure before her made things seem still more unreal and shadowy.

"'Why, what are you?' she exclaimed.

"'Only Timothy Craig, dearie; just Timothy Craig.'

"'Oh, where am I, and what am I doing? and how is it all, and what are you going to do with that kettle?' exclaimed Peggy.

"'You've been asleep, dearie,' said the old man, 'and the kettle's going to boil, and we're going to have some tea.'

"'But am I asleep now?' asked Peggy.

"The publican did not answer; he was busy poking up the fire and putting on the kettle.

"And now as Peggy watched him, and wondered what it could all mean, she began thinking about the fairy stories her mother told her sometimes — stories of little girls and boys being lost in a forest, and meeting funny little old men dancing before crackling fires—little old men who turned out to be elves or fairies, who did all sorts of kind things to the little boys and girls. So she made up her mind that she was asleep, and that she was

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dreaming that she had been lost in a forest (or a public-house), and now here was the blazing fire and the funny little old man. So Peggy did not feel at all frightened, and she watched him trying to boil his kettle, only she wondered when he would begin to dance. He did not begin to dance, but he began to sing; he turned round to Peggy, put his head on one side, and sang—

'Polly, put the kettle on;
Sukey, take it off again;
Polly, put the kettle on,
And we'll all have tea.'

"'My name's not Polly,' she said, when he came to the end, 'my name's Peggy.'

"He made no answer, but putting his head on the other side, began again—

'Peggy, put the kettle on;
Sukey, take it off again;
Peggy, put the kettle on,
And we'll all have tea.'

"'It's a nice little song,' said Peggy, laughing, 'but *your* name can't be Sukey, I'm sure. What was it you said it was just now?'

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"'Timothy Craig, dearie; Timothy Craig.'

"'That's too long,' she said, 'and Tim's too short; try Timmy.' So the old man sang—

Peggy, put the kettle on;
Timmy, take it off again;
Peggy, put the kettle on,
And we'll all have tea.'

"'But why *all?*' asked she; 'there's only two of us. What does one say when there's only two?'

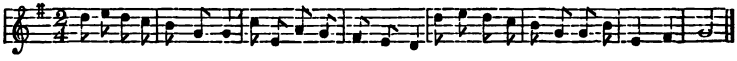
"'Both?' suggested the publican.

"'That's it,' said Peggy; 'now let's sing it together.'

"So Peggy and the publican stood opposite each other, and sang to different tunes—

'Peggy, put the kettle on;
Timmy, take it off again;
Peggy, put the kettle on,
And we'll both have tea.'

"The publican sang it to the same tune as before—



but Peggy sang it to her own tune of 'Oh, what fun,' etc.:—

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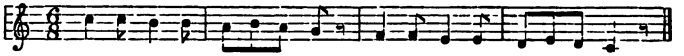

"Now, if you try these two tunes together, you will see that the duet was rather a funny one.

"But *they* were both quite satisfied with it; for Peggy clapped her hands when it was done, and the old man stamped with his feet on the ground, and said 'An-cor!'

"But in the middle of it the kettle boiled, and he was obliged to turn to the fire and take it off.

"'When *are* you going to dance?' asked Peggy, watching him with eager interest.

"'Bless your heart!' he answered, 'I can't dance, dearie; my dancing days are over long ago. I'm too old, dearie—too old.'

"'But fairies always dance, however old they are,' said Peggy.

"'That may be,' he answered; 'but then, you see, dearie, I'm not a fairy.'

"'Yes you are,' said Peggy, 'of course you are;' and advancing to the old man, she looked up in his face. 'Of course you're a fairy,' she repeated; 'there's the fire, and there are you,

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and I've been expecting to see you begin to dance every minute.'

"'Lor bless the child!' he exclaimed, 'she's not half awake yet. Why, you're dreaming, dearie!'

"'I know I am,' said Peggy; 'you're my dream, and the fire's my dream, and being here's my dream—at least,' she added, correcting herself, 'it's not exactly a dream, it's a fairy story; or at least it's a fairy-story kind of a dream. You know, in fairy tales, little girls (like me) are lost (like me), and meet funny little old humpbacked men (like you), and——'

"'Eh! what?' said the publican, looking round sharply, '*I'm* not humpbacked!'

"'Oh, well, it doesn't matter,' said Peggy. 'As long as you're a funny little old man, it'll do just as well; and you *are* a funny little old man, aint you?'

"'A funny little old man, am I? eh!' said the publican. 'Ah! well, I suppose I am, dearie; I suppose I am!'

"'Yes,' said Peggy, 'of course you are, and you know in the fairy story the funny little old

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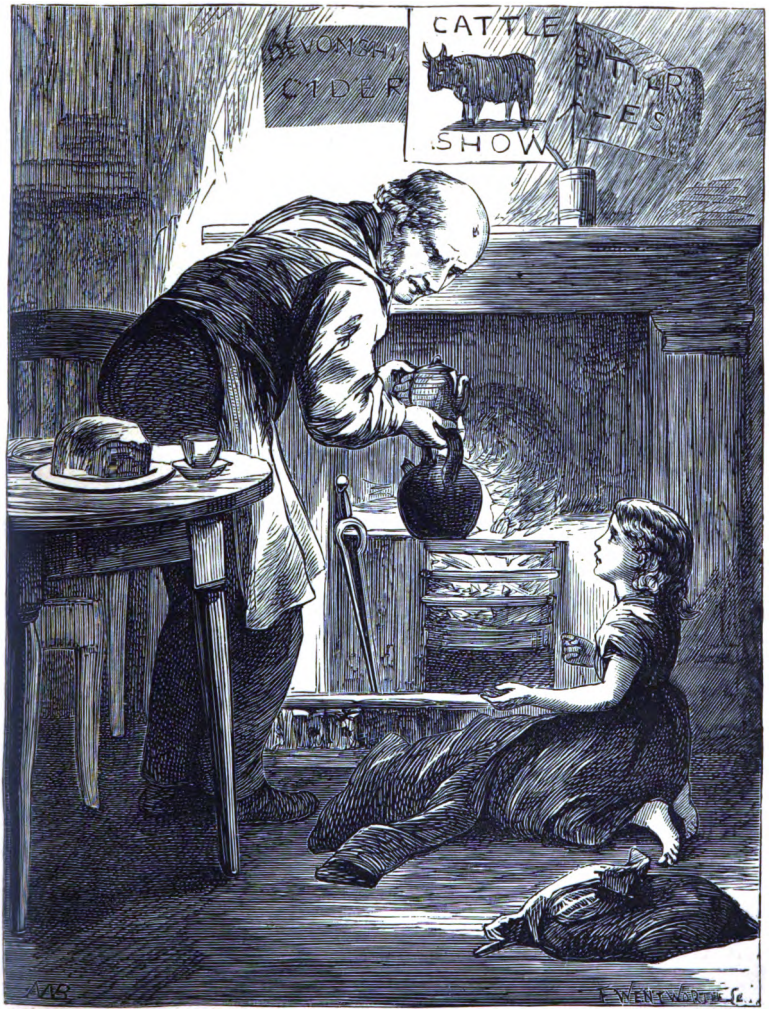

"A FUNNY LITTLE OLD MAN, AM I?" SAID THE PUBLICAN. *Page* 80.

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man dances before the fire, so that's what I've been expecting you to do.'

"'Well, well, I never!' said the old man. 'But come, come, you've been asleep long enough now, dearie; you'd better wake up and have something to eat.'

"'Oh, no! don't wake me,' said Peggy, entreatingly. 'I'm so happy, and I like my dream so much. The fire's so warm, and the breakfast so good, and I've got my threepenny back. I know if I wake I shall find it gone, and be very cold and hungry. Please, *please* don't wake me!' And she clasped her hands and looked so beseeching, that the publican's eyes moistened as he watched her, and he took refuge in his old answer—

"'No—no—no, dearie, I won't. We'll go on with our dream, you and I,' he said, briskly, to restore her, and he executed a somersault before the fire, meant to stand for the expected dance. 'What else does the funny little old man do?'

"'Oh, all sorts of kind things to the little boys and girls who are lost,' said Peggy, clasping her hands.

"'All right, then,' said he, cutting bread and

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putting a slice of bacon on it; 'sit down here, little lost girl, and eat and drink as much as you can.' And he began making the tea.'

"Considering she was only dreaming, Peggy felt very hungry, and the bread and bacon tasted particularly real in her mouth. It staggered her a little, and she began wondering again if she was awake or not.

"'Do you believe in fairy stories and dreams?' she asked the old man.

"'Believe in them!' he exclaimed, with well-feigned animation; 'Lor bless you, yes! Don't you?'

"'Not quite,' said Peggy, 'because Mammy says they're not really true. But I like them; oh, I like them so much! Do you know any to tell me?'

"'I used to know a many,' he answered, sighing, 'and to tell a many, but it's a sight of years since.'

"'Who used you to tell them to? asked Peggy, innocently.

"'Be quiet,' he said, angrily; 'hold your tongue!' But he repented the next moment,

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and said, 'It was to my gal, when she was a little 'un like you.'

"'Is she dead?' asked Peggy, in a whisper.

"'Dead to me,' he answered; 'dead and buried to me.'

"'I didn't know fairies had little girls of their own,' mused Peggy to herself. 'Now tell me the story,' she said out loud.

"So he told her the story of 'Rip Van Winkle,' the man who fell asleep one day on the mountains, and who, when he woke, found everything changed—those whom he had left young, grown old; those whom he had left old, long since dead and forgotten; his cottage gone, and replaced by a house peopled with strangers; and how at last he discovered that he had slept for forty years. And Peggy, as she listened, felt everything grow more dreamlike than ever. 'And you see, dearie,' concluded the old man, 'I think it's something of the sort that happened to you.'

"'What!' exclaimed Peggy, 'have I been asleep for forty years?'

"'No, no, dearie, not that exactly, but I'm thinking you've been asleep a long while.'

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"'Ah, but I'm not awake yet,' said Peggy, in a tone of supreme satisfaction, 'so that's the difference between me and Rip Van Winkle.'

"At this moment the clock that boomed at midnight struck the hour of seven, and the publican held up his hand—

"'Listen, dearie, it's striking seven; the customers will be coming, and I must open the shop. Try and wake up; it aint a dream, Peggy; you're a-sitting in the public where your Daddy was a-drinking last night. Maybe he'll be along presently. Wake up, dearie! Listen! it's a real clock—one—two—three——'

"'No, no!' cried Peggy, stopping her ears. 'Don't let me hear it! Don't let me listen to it! It'll wake me up, and send me back to the cold streets away from the fire, and you, and my threepenny-bit. So often,' she went on, holding out her hands entreatingly, 'I've been dreaming of lovely fires and warm rooms, and beautiful places, then the clocks have struck and sent them all away. Don't let me listen to it!'

"'I won't, dearie—I won't,' he said, soothingly, taking her on his knee, and covering her ears with his hands till the clock had done

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striking. 'Don't fret, Peggy, but sit quiet in my lap while I tell you another story.'

"'There was a little gal, dearie, a small gal (maybe a little six-year-old or thereabouts), who came into a public one night along with her Dad. It was a rough night, and the wind cutting. How long she might ha' been in the streets afore she came into the public I can't say, but it must ha' been a longish time, for she was blue with cold, and shivering all over. Her dad came up to the counter and asked for spirits, which wor served to him by—well, never mind, dearie, who served 'em to him; anyhows he was served. Well, he hands over the counter a wee bit of silver——'

"'It was my threepenny-bit,' exclaimed Peggy, starting up.

"'Hush, hush, dearie, don't yer talk till I've finished my story. Well, as I was a-saying, he hands over the counter a threepenny-bit. The little girl looks at him as much as to say, "Don't spend it, daddy!" but he didn't make no count of her lookings at all, but gives the money and gets his spirits; then ups with his glass to her mouth, and tells her to drink. But

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she won't touch a drop, Peggy, but goes away to the fire and sits down, and falls fast asleep. Her dad drinks on till twelve, and is that far gone when the shop shuts that he thinks no more of his gal, but goes out of the public, and she's left a-sleeping by the fire. Him that served her dad to spirits, 'a funny little old man,' dearie, a very funny little old man, finds the child a-sleeping by the fire and covers her up with his coat till morning; and hearing her cry out for her daddy not to spend the money, he guesses, like, that it's the wee bit of silver she's fretting after, and puts it back into her hand. When he comes in at six next day, she's lying fast asleep still. It's a foggy morning, dearie, and he don't see no use opening the shutters; because why? because there's no daylight to let in; so he lights the gas, and lights the fire, and all the time the six-year-old keeps a-sleeping on.

"Then he gets the breakfast, and is going to boil the kettle, when the child wakes up. Seeing the fire and the gas a-burning just as it were when she fell asleep, the little 'un thinks it's still the night before, like; but when 'him

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that served the spirits' comes up, she thinks him a 'funny little old man,' and believes she's a-dreaming, or in fairy-land, or I don't know what, and the more so when she finds her bit of silver safe in her little hand.

"But it was no dream, dearie; it was all true—and it was no fairy, but old Timothy Craig, who put the money back. For 'Timothy,' and 'him who served the spirits,' and the 'funny little old man,' were all the same.

"'Can you tell me who the little girl was, Peggy? Now, guess—do!'

"'It was me!' cried Peggy, jumping up; 'and this is the public-house, and I'm wide awake, after all!'

"'That's it, dearie—that's it,' said he, highly elated at the success of his plan. 'But you look puzzle-headed still, little 'un—what is it?'

"'Is it really morning?' exclaimed Peggy. 'Has the whole long night gone?'

"The publican answered by undoing the shutters and letting in the grey light of the foggy December day.

"'Oh, dear! oh, dear!' said Peggy, wringing her hands; 'poor mammy! poor mammy! I

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promised to be so quick. And she'll be so frightened; and she's not a drop of anything for her cough. Why, I said I would be back before she could say "Jack Robinson," and how many, many times she must have said it! And she'll think I've been listening to an organ, or looking at Punch!'

"The old man looked bewildered, but a few inquiries drew from Peggy the tale of her adventures, from the time she had left her mother to buy the milk, till the moment she had entered the public-house with her father.

"'A good-for-nothing fellow,' he muttered. 'A real bad fellow.'

"'But let me go now,' said Peggy, clasping her hands; 'let me run home quick and tell mammy I'm safe.'

"'Wait one moment, dearie, and I'll come with you,' said the publican, and we'll buy some milk and bread for her as we go along.'

"He shut up the shutters again, so as to make it appear as if the shop were not yet opened; then put on his coat, and taking Peggy's hand, led her out into the street, and locked the door behind him.

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"So they left the scene of Peggy's dreams and illusions, and stepped out into the cold reality of a London street on a foggy morning.

"Past the lamp-post where she had prayed and wept last night: past the archway where she had stood, tremblingly concealed: to the baker's shop she had left with such a pang of disappointment.

"'You shall buy the bread, and I'll buy the milk,' said the publican, as they went in; 'you two 'll have got your little feast, after all.'

"So the woman, who was 'kind though rough,' received an order for a threepenny loaf, and I was laid on the counter.

"Then the publican and Peggy hurried away to the milk shop, and I was left reflecting.

"Reflecting on the child, and the adventures of the night; reflecting that it *had* been very like a fairy tale, after all,—for she had been lost, like the children she had heard of, in a forest of want and sadness: she had met, like them, with a little old man by a crackling fire, who had turned out indeed to be a good fairy, by whom she had been fed, and warmed, and comforted.

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And above all, she had found me, who had seemed hopelessly severed from her at night, lying quietly in her hand in the morning.

CHAPTER VIII.

"As the baker's wife picked me up, to put me into the till, she said to herself, 'By the way, I might just as well ha' given little Gould the stuff for them shirts. Tom!' she called out sharply, 'bring me that there longcloth off the table, and run after that gal as hard as you can cut. Look sharp, now!'

"A little boy appeared from the back premises with a parcel, and began making his way to the door.

"'Here,' his mother called after him, 'you may as well take the money for them she's finished. Now, don't yer lose it, d'ye hear? And say I'll be round soon to see how Mrs. Gould's getting along. If yer can't catch the girl, run on to the court with the parcel. No. 2, remember. Now be off!' So saying, she put me and some coppers into his hand.

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"Tom ran off, whistling; but though he 'looked sharp,' he did not overtake the publican and Peggy.

"I knew he would not, because they were going to the milk shop first.

"We went along the street I now knew so well, past the public-house and pawnbroker's, to the court where the Goulds lived.

"The dirty children were still playing and quarrelling together, as if they had never been to bed all night, and everything looked much the same as before.

"We went up the creaky staircase, and Tom knocked at the battered door.

"'Who's there?' said a gruff voice from within.

"Tom gave his message in a high treble voice, and the door was partially opened, and Peggy's father appeared.

"He took in the parcel and the money, and shut the door again.

"Here I was, then, once more in the miserable little room.

"Gould counted the money carefully, and put it on the mantelpiece; then turning to the bed

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where Peggy's mother was lying, he put the parcel down upon it, and went on talking. I stole a glance at Mrs. Gould's face, but I looked away quickly, for I could not bear to see the look of despair that was stamped upon it.

"'I tell yer,' said her husband, in a rough but steady voice, for he was quite sober now, "that I only know what I've told yer. I can't remember nothing more than a-meeting of her in the street, and her a-following of me into the public. *She*'s safe enough, depend on't. Whatever's the use of your worriting like this? *She*'s sharp enough to take care of herself.'

"'Oh, Ned!' said Mrs. Gould, imploringly, 'for God's sake go out and look for her!'

"He muttered something sulkily, about looking for a needle in a haystack.

"'Ned,' she entreated again, 'for the sake of all that's holy, go to the public-house, and—'

"'It's the first time I ever knew you ask me to do *that*,' he interrupted, sneeringly; 'it's quite another song to what you generally sing.'

"'To the public-house, Ned,' she resumed gently, without heeding his words, 'and ask if they know anything about her there.'

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"'Gammon,' he answered. 'Do yer think folks take the trouble to look after every brat that goes in and out of a public? You just wait patiently and quietly till she turns up again. *She*'ll find her way home fast enough.'

"'Good God!' uttered Mrs. Gould, more to herself than to him, 'does he tell me to *wait* still? Haven't I *waited* the whole of this dreadful night for her little footstep on the stair? Haven't I heard every clock strike every hour while I *waited* for him to come home with news of her? And when he came, was he not so dead to everything, that I knew I must *wait* till he shook off his drunkenness before I could make him understand what I wanted? And now that he is himself again—now that the moment I have longed for has come, he tells me to *wait* patiently and quietly! Patiently and quietly! when the only child that has been spared to me may be lying cold and dead—run over, perhaps, like widow Payne's little girl last week! Patiently and quietly! when the one last thing I lived for—the one last thing that made my miserable life bearable, is gone I know not where! Oh, Peggy, my

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lamb! my darling!' she cried, clasping her hands together, 'where are you? where are you? Why did I let you go?' she moaned, rocking herself backwards and forwards on the pillow. 'Why did I not listen to something that told me some harm would happen if I did? Ned,' she concluded, springing up in the bed, and holding out her hands to him, 'if you have one spark of a man left in you —one lingering trace of what you used to be, do what I ask you! For the sake of the old days when we were so happy—for the memory of the little ones who can never come back to us, have pity on me, and go and look for the only child we have left!'

"The man was touched a little by his wife's appeal. He got up and put on his hat.

"She was too much exhausted by her own emotion to say more, but she watched him in a fever of impatience as he moved leisurely about the room preparing his pipe.

"He knocked the ashes slowly out of it, refilled it carefully with tobacco, and struck a lucifer match against the wall.

"The first went out. He struck another;

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then putting the pipe in his mouth, he lighted the tobacco, gave three prolonged puffs, and sauntered out of the room.

"'Oh! Ned, Ned,' said Mrs. Gould to herself when he was gone, 'how drink has changed you! Can it be the same Ned who used to play with Peggy when she first began to run alone, and think nothing of any trouble he took to please her? And now he hardly seems to care that she is lost in the streets of London!'

"She lay still for a little while, and then her thoughts must have strayed from her husband to her child, for when next she spoke she said—

"'How many times, when I have been like to sink under my troubles, has her bright face and merry voice brought me round again!

"'How often has she seen light where I saw nothing but darkness, and turned every trifle into a joy!

"'What will my life be without her sunny smile and happy chatter?

"'O God! have patience with me, for I am very, very miserable!'

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"With her hands clasped together, and her lips moving in prayer, she remained after this outburst with her eyes fixed on the door.

"Presently whispering was heard on the stairs outside; stealthy footsteps, as of people who did not wish their approach to be heard.

"I hoped Mrs. Gould would not notice it; but I saw in a minute she had: for she started up, and trembled in every limb.

"'I knew it,' escaped from her white lips; 'something terrible has happened to her, and they are bringing her home. They are afraid to tell me. . . . But they need not. . . . Come in, whoever you are,' she said, raising her voice a little, 'I am ready to hear it. . . . I always knew it, . . . only in pity tell me quickly——'

"The footsteps paused outside the door, and there was a silence.

"Mrs. Gould sank back on the pillow; and through the stillness that reigned, arose the sound of her trembling voice, 'Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.'

"Then with a sudden push the door was

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burst open, and a ringing laugh resounded through the room.

"'Mammy,' said a merry little voice, 'how many times have you said "Jack Robinson?"'

CHAPTER IX.

"It was a good thing that the old publican had followed Peggy pretty closely, for the sudden revulsion of feeling was too much for the poor mother, and she would have fainted but for his timely assistance.

"He gave her some brandy out of a flask he carried in his pocket, and threw water over her face out of the old cracked pitcher. She was soon sufficiently recovered to realise that her child had indeed come back to her.

"She asked no questions, she called for no history: Peggy's cheek was against hers, Peggy's arms were round her neck—that was enough.

"'Oh, dear mammy,' cried the child, hugging her tight, 'I'm so sorry I frightened you with my "surprise." That was my "surprise," you know, jumping into the room like that. And

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oh, mammy, I hope you weren't very frightened at my not coming back last night. It wasn't my fault; indeed it wasn't. I didn't listen to the organs, or look at Punch, or anything. I was fast asleep—— But shall I tell you the story from the beginning, mammy?'

"The mother gave a faint gesture of consent, and Peggy plunged at once into a most vague and confused account of the night's adventures, in which dreams and realities, Rip Van Winkle and Timothy Craig, were so strangely mixed, that Mrs. Gould looked completely bewildered.

"The publican came to the rescue at last, and gave a more concise history.

"But letting in a third person upon the events of the night seemed to revive within him some of his feelings of shame for his own weakness; for he added, apologetically, 'It were so late, you see, I couldn't well turn her out, and it was a rough night too.'

"Foolish old man! as if he need excuse himself for kindness to Peggy, to Peggy's mother!

"'God bless you, sir,' said Mrs. Gould, when he had finished, holding out her thin hand;

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'God bless you and reward you for your goodness!'

"At this moment there was a brisk knock at the door, and the baker's wife came in.

"The story was told all over again, and her anger blazed forth at the conduct of the husband and father.

"'Well I never!' she exclaimed. 'No, I never did hear of such a wretch.'

"Mrs. Gould tried to excuse him, but it was no use.

"The publican and the baker's wife vied with each other in heaping abuse on the wretched Gould. Tale upon tale of his selfishness, idleness, and drunkenness poured forth. The publican told the woman how he came night after night to the public-house, and drank till he could drink no longer. The woman told the publican how, bit by bit, the furniture had disappeared from the room, and how recklessly he had pawned them, that he might spend the money on drink.

"The drunkard's wife attempted once more to stem the torrent, but her voice was too feeble to make itself heard.

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"Peggy meanwhile sat on the bed, with her eyes fixed on the talkers, and her ears drinking in every word that was said.

"'One thing is certain,' said the publican, 'he won't do it for long. If he ain't soon carried off [redacted], my name aint Timothy Craig.'

"The words were hardly out of his mouth before the door opened, and the object of all their abuse came in. It was evident that he had been drinking again, for his face was flushed and his gait unsteady.

"I wondered where he could have got any money, till, on looking down to the mantelpiece on which I lay, I saw that all the coppers that had come in with me had disappeared. I reflected that he must have taken them up when I thought he was knocking the ashes out of his pipe. He looked very much surprised to see the room so full.

"'Good day, Timmy,' he said carelessly to the publican, 'what brings you here so early? And —— Halloa, Peggy! why, you've got back, have you?'

"'Got back!' stormed forth the baker's

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wife, 'yes, and no fault of yours, neither. Much you care whether your child's lost, or run over, or anythink. Out upon you for a cruel, worthless man—a selfish husband and a bad father! Shame on yer! shame!'

"Edward Gould was rather muddled with drink, and he seemed hardly to understand what she was talking about. He turned to the publican for explanation.

"But old Timothy Craig was fairly roused now, and he loaded the drunkard with reproaches. He had not time to say much, for the baker's wife was of a voluble tongue, and she soon broke in again. He would not, however, give up till he had said his say, so the two joined together; and so fierce, so cutting were their upbraidings, that the drunkard cowered before them.

"The publican was the first to stop; and then the baker's wife took it up by herself and went glibly on.

"'Look at this here empty room,' she said, gesticulating with both hands. 'Where are the chairs, and the table, and the rest of the furniture? Who pawned the things, and spent the

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money? Look at your poor sick wife, who you've half killed with this night's anxiety, lying there with hardly a blanket to cover her. And your innocent child, too, who you've behaved to as no father should. You're a real bad fellow, Edward Gould, and I've no patience with you!'

"She stopped for want of breath, and the drunkard took advantage of the pause to retreat to the door.

"Goaded by her reproaches, and being, moreover, in a maudlin state, he began to cry.

"'It's all true,' he said, feebly, wiping his eyes; 'it's all true, but it's the drink that's done it. I was a better man once; it's all the drink.'

"'But I'm no use to any one,' he went on, 'and no one will give me work, because they know my ways too well. The best thing I can do is to go away—go somewhere where nobody knows me, and where I can never trouble no one no more. They'll do better without me.

"'There is places,' he went on, looking vacantly round, and speaking to no one in particular, 'where a fellow may go and get work, and ——'

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"'Places!' echoed the baker's wife, scornfully. 'Yes, places enough for true hearts and willing hands, not for a drunken good-for-nothing like you.'

"'Why, there's not a man in London has had more chances nor you've had; and much use you've made of 'em! Places, indeed, why you'd take your idle ways and drunken habits with you wherever you went.

"'Change *yourself*, Edward Gould: it's not the place, but the man!'

"'I can't,' burst forth the miserable man, 'it's too late!' And no words can describe how abject he looked, standing in the middle of the room, with his haggard face and bloodshot eyes. 'Even at this moment, while I am talking, I'm longing for a drop of spirits with a longing I can't describe to you. There are seven devils within me calling for drink, and I must obey them.'

"'I'm going, Mary,' he said feebly, turning round to his wife, 'I don't rightly know where; but you'll be better without me.'

"'Ned, Ned,' said she, 'don't talk like that.'

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"'I'd much better go,' he repeated; 'it's come to that, that I can't see money lying about, without taking it for drink. This morning I took the money that was paid for the shirts. Why, there's a bit of silver lying on the mantelpiece now, that if somebody don't hide I shall be obliged ——'

"But before the words were out of his mouth, the baker's wife crossed the room in three strides and snatched me up.

"The drunkard put on his hat and opened the door.

"'Peggy,' whispered Mrs. Gould, 'run after Daddy, and bring him back.'

"Peggy gave her little shoulder a determined shrug, and did not move from her place.

"'Peggy,' said the soft voice again, 'ask Daddy not to go.'

"Peggy's little breast heaved. 'He's been so unkind, mammy.'

"'He's so very sorry, dearie.'

"Peggy bounded off the bed, and ran to the door with outstretched arms.

"'Daddy, Daddy, don't go without giving me a kiss.'

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"The drunkard was completely overcome. He took the child in his arms, and his tears fell upon her bright hair.

"'Come away,' said the publican to the baker's wife, 'and leave the three together. They'll do now.'"

CHAPTER X.

"THE publican and the baker's wife parted at the corner of the street, and she returned to her shop. As she opened the door, she perceived that I was still in her hand. 'Oh, bother!' she said to herself, 'I must send it back by Tom. Is Tom at home?' she called out.

"Tom was not at home, so she dropped me into the till, for safety, till he should return.

"And so it happened that I was given in change to the next customer, and another threepenny went back to Peggy in my place.

"I was terribly disappointed: but there was no help for it. I was spent by my new owner, in the course of the day, at a chemist's shop in

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Oxford Street, and I lay in the chemist's drawer for many days afterwards.

"It might have been a week or ten days later that I was taken out, and given to a gentleman who was buying some scented soap, and he shut me up in his purse, and walked me off.

"He took his purse out of his pocket when he got home, and took me out just as he opened a door on the ground-floor.

"I found myself entering a comfortable room, which seemed to be a school-room, for the walls were hung with maps, and a lady, who seemed to be the governess, was reading out loud to two little girls.

"On their father's entrance they both jumped up, and came to meet him.

"'Well, mademoiselle,' said he to [illegible] verness, 'what sort of account have yo[illegible] to-day?'

"Mademoiselle answered, in Fren[illegible] they had both been very good.

"'That is lucky,' said he, 'for I have b[illegible] a threepenny-bit for the money-box.'

"'Oh! thank you, papa,' said the ch[illegible]

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and they held up their faces to be kissed. They were pretty little girls; the eldest must have been about Peggy's age, only she was much taller. She was slim, and held herself well; her hair was dark, and so were her eyes. The other child looked about a year and a half younger, and was a fat little fair thing, with a very pink colour. I fancied as I looked at them that I had seen them somewhere before, but I could not remember where.

"'Well, Daisy,' said the father to the eldest child, 'and how is the money-box getting on?'

"'Oh, rather slowly,' she answered. 'I've only put twopence in for a week; and it doesn't sound very full when I shake it.'

"'How many times a day do you shake it?' asked he.

"'*I* don't shake it often,' answered Daisy, 'but Nelly is always shaking it, and trying to peep through the slit.

"'Aint you *longing* to break it open, and count the money, Nell—eh?' the father asked of his youngest daughter, as he took her up on his lap.

"'Oh, *aint* I!' she answered.

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"'And when is it to be opened?' he inquired, as he played with her curly hair.

"'Mamma says not till it is quite, quite full,' she answered, shaking her head rather sorrowfully.

"'Dear, dear, how terrible! But what is the money being saved for?'

"'We've not quite settled,' said Daisy, 'but it is to be whatever we are wanting most at the time: only we are to agree in wanting the same thing. I know what *I* should like; but Nelly wants something different every day. I never *did* know any one change so often!' And Daisy looked rather aggrieved.

"'And are you sure, Daisy, you will want the same thing when the day comes, as you do now?'

"'Oh, quite sure, papa. I want a doll that will dress and undress.'

"'I should like it too,' said Nelly.

"'Why, Nelly, you wanted a pump yesterday,' exclaimed Daisy.

"'Oh, yes; so I do. I should like a pump much better.'

"'I thought you were longing for a

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baby-house, Eleanore,' put in the French governess.

"'Oh, yes,' said Nelly, 'so I was. I should like a baby-house best of all.'

"'There!' said Daisy. 'You see, papa,' she added, turning to her father, 'she changes every minute.'

"'Well,' said her father, 'we'll see, when the day comes, whether Daisy will have changed as well as Nelly. Meanwhile, here is the threepenny; mind you don't lose it.'

"'Mamma keeps the box,' said Daisy, as she received me carefully into her hand, 'so I will take care of it till she comes home.'

"'It's almost time for her to be back, isn't it?' said the father, looking at his watch—'past five; she'll be here directly.' Isn't baby coming down this afternoon?'

"'I think I hear him on the stairs now,' said Daisy; and she ran out of the room, followed by Nelly.

"There was no doubt it was baby, for uneven footsteps were heard outside, and inarticulate sounds. Then the door was pushed open, and a jolly little fellow of about eighteen

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months old came trotting in between his two sisters.

"'Ha! my little man,' said the father, 'and how are you?'

"Baby stretched out his arms, and his father took him up; but before he had time to begin a game with him, a carriage dashed up to the door, and they all rushed to the window, the children calling out, 'Mamma! mamma!'

"'Mamma' got out of the carriage, and came up the steps. When she saw all the heads at the window, she threw back her veil and kissed her hand. I knew the face and the smile again directly—it was Peggy's 'kind lady'—

. . . . . .

'Tall and slim, and held her head like a queen.'

"I could not help thinking of Mrs. Gould's words in describing her young mistress, as I watched Peggy's 'kind lady' come into the room, the description fitted so exactly.

"I was now a witness of the scene I had on a former occasion only guessed at. The little girls ran forward to meet their mother, and the baby struggled to get into her arms. I re-

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membered how I lay in Peggy's little cold hands, while I imagined what was going on in the room that looked so bright from the wet streets.

"Baby absorbed so much attention, that little Nelly presently strayed away from the group, and climbing up on the window-seat, stood watching the passers-by.

"All of a sudden she turned round with a look of great excitement, and called out, 'Daisy, come here quick; here she is again!'

"'Who?' asked Daisy, without moving, for she was teaching baby to do pat-a-cake, as he sat on her mother's lap.

"'The little girl,' answered Nelly; 'the same little girl.'

"'What little girl?' asked the father of his eldest daughter.

"'She's the same little girl mamma gave some money to about a fortnight ago,' answered Daisy.

"'Of course,' said Mr. Ogilvie, 'if you relieve a beggar once, they'll always find their way back again. Come away from the window,

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Nelly; we shall have all the beggars in London coming here.'

"'She's not a beggar,' said little Nelly, indignantly; 'she does not beg one bit. Please, papa, let me stay.'

"'No, no, darling; as long as you stay there, she'll be expecting to get something. Come away, there's a good little girl, or else I shall have to send John out to tell her to go away.'

"Little Nelly looked very much inclined to cry, but she began, slowly and unwillingly, to descend from the window-seat.

"Meanwhile, Daisy crept round to her mother and whispered, 'Please don't let papa send the little girl away. She's such a nice little girl, and she doesn't beg a bit.'

"'I must look at this little girl,' said Mrs. Ogilvie. 'If it's the same child I gave some money to last week, I should like to look at her again. I remember she reminded me of some one, and I could not think of whom.'

"She got up and went to the window, followed by her little daughter.

"I nearly jumped out of Daisy's hand with

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delight when I saw that it was indeed Peggy who was leaning against the area rails.

"At the sight of her 'kind lady,' a bright flush spread itself all over her face.

"Mrs. Ogilvie looked at her very earnestly. Peggy raised her eyes to the window with her own radiant smile. Her sun-bonnet falling back at the same moment disclosed the bright tints of her hair, and Mrs. Ogilvie exclaimed—

"'I know who the child reminds me of—my dear old maid, Mary!'"

CHAPTER XI.

"ATTRACTED by his wife's exclamation, Mr. Ogilvie came to the window.

"'Don't you remember, Henry,' said she, turning to him, 'a maid I had just before I married?'

"'I can't say I do, dear,' he answered.

"'Well, at any rate, you must have heard me speak of her. She lived with me for several years, and only left me because she was going to be married herself.'

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"'I think I have heard you mention her,' he answered. 'But what made you think of her?'

"'Well, because that little girl is the most extraordinary likeness of her that I ever saw. I really think it must be her child. You know, she married the same year as I did; and that child looks about Daisy's age; so it might easily be.'

"'A remarkably pretty child,' said Mr. Ogilvie, putting up his eye-glass. 'What lovely-coloured hair!'

"'I know,' said Mrs. Ogilvie; 'that is just it. Mary's hair was that peculiar tint. And another of her peculiarities was her remarkably radiant smile.'

"'She married very much against my advice, and against the wishes of her friends. The man was in good circumstances, and of a very respectable family, but he had an unfortunate propensity for drinking. I can't say he actually got drunk, but he was often only half sober. It was well known in the village, but Mary would never believe it, or hear a word against him; so she married him in spite of

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us all. I have always had a misgiving that the marriage had not turned out well, because I have never heard of Mary from that day to this. But they must have sunk very low, if this is indeed Mary's child. Just look how ragged the poor little thing is!'

"'What was the man's name?' asked Mr. Ogilvie.

"'Well, that is just what I cannot remember,' answered his wife. 'Her maiden name was Mary Price, but her husband's name has quite escaped my memory.'

"'It would be no use my asking the little girl her name, then?'

"'No; but I should very much like to ask her a few questions. It cannot be an accidental likeness, that. I assure you it is quite marvellous.'

"'Shall I bring her in, Margaret?'

"'I don't think there could be any harm. She looks clean, though she is ragged.'

"'Oh, what fun! what fun!' exclaimed Daisy and Nelly, clapping their hands; and baby thought they were playing 'pat-a-cake,' and tossed all the bricks into an imaginary

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oven, and crowed and laughed with delight. Mrs. Ogilvie came and sat down near him, and the little girls established themselves on each side of her, while they looked anxiously at the door.

"I hardly knew Peggy again when she appeared in the doorway, she looked so shy and frightened.

"The fact was, poor little Peggy was quite scared at finding herself in so luxurious an apartment, and among such beautifully dressed people. The sight of baby's scarlet sash and Mrs. Ogilvie's velvet gown paralysed her. She had never seen such things except in the shop windows in Oxford Street, and had hardly realised that they were ever really brought into the wear and tear of every-day life. Nelly ran towards her, and Peggy drew back.

"'Come back, Nelly, darling,' said Mrs. Ogilvie; 'she is shy. Come in, little girl,' she said, gently, to Peggy, 'you must not be frightened;' and she held out her hand, smiling kindly as she did so.

"'You look just like you did when you said, "Here, little girl, take this,"' said Peggy, blush-

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"'No,' said Peggy, 'neither. She's called Mrs. Gould.'

"Is that the name, Margaret?' asked Mr. Ogilvie.

"'It's very stupid of me, dear,' she answered, 'but I cannot remember. I am more certain than ever, though. The likeness grows upon me every minute; the voice and expression are the same. Why don't you come in, little woman?' she added, to Peggy.

"'I didn't know,' said Peggy, looking doubtfully down at her little bare feet, 'whether I might tread on the beautiful carpet.'

"'Come right in, little girl,' said Mrs. Ogilvie, 'and tell me your name.'

"'My name's Peggy,' said the child, cautiously advancing; 'Peggy Gould.'

"Mrs. Ogilvie slightly shook her head as she looked at her husband. 'I'm sure Mary would have named her child after me.'

"'What's *your* name?' said Peggy to Daisy.

"'Daisy is what I'm always called,' she answered, 'but I've got a real name in my copy-books, which is much longer and grander.'

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"'I never write in copy-books, but *I*'ve got a longer, grander name, too,' said Peggy.

"'What is your grand name?'

"'Margaret,' answered Daisy; 'I have been called after mamma.'

"'Why, that's *my* grand name, too!' exclaimed Peggy; 'and I'm called after mammy's mistress, who she lived with before she was married.'

"The husband and wife exchanged glances, and then Mrs. Ogilvie called Peggy to her, and took both her hands in hers. 'Tell me, little Peggy,' she said, 'did you ever hear your mother talk about her mistress?'

"'Oh, yes!' answered Peggy; 'only the other evening, after you gave me the threepenny, she told me all about her, and how she gave her a shawl like her own, and how she was sure she would know me from being so like what she was.'

"'What did she say about her young mistress?' asked Mr. Ogilvie.

"'She said,' answered Peggy, 'that she was tall and slim, and "held her head like a queen."'

"'Well done,' said he; 'this is very exciting. Go on, little Peggy; what else did she say?'

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"'She said she had the sweetest face she ever saw,' answered the child, turning to him, 'and that she should always remember it, because it was so gentle and so kind.'

"'The description tallies remarkably,' said Mr. Ogilvie, looking at his wife; 'doesn't it, Margaret?'

"Mrs. Ogilvie smiled and blushed, and that was all the answer she gave him.

"'Daisy, darling,' she said to her eldest daughter, 'run up and ask Craig for my Indian shawl, and bring it down with you.'

"Daisy ran off, followed as usual by the officious Nelly, and soon returned, laden with a heavy shawl, which she put down on her mother's lap.

"'Now, come here, Peggy, and tell me if you ever saw anything like this shawl before?'

"The room was getting rather dark, and the patterns of the shawl were not very distinct; so that as Peggy advanced, it looked so exactly like the one familiar to her since her infancy, that she clasped her hands and exclaimed, 'It's mammy's shawl! Oh, how did you get it?'

"But the footman brought in the lamp, and

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the moment the light shone on the shawl, Peggy's face fell.

"'Oh, no, it's not,' she said, sorrowfully; 'I see now it's much grander, and not near so shabby.'

"'Does your mother wear hers much?' asked Mrs. Ogilvie.

"'Oh, no,' said Peggy, shaking her head, 'it's pawned long ago. She could not bear to let it go, because of her mistress, and because Baby used to be wrapped in it when he was so ill.'

"'Is baby dead?' asked Mrs. Ogilvie, gently.

"'Yes,' said Peggy, 'nearly two years ago, and Moll, too, who was a year younger than me. They're both in heaven, and mammy's only got me now.'

"'Poor Mary!' said Mrs. Ogilvie, half to herself; and she lifted her own baby up off the floor and kissed him, and drew little Nelly close to her, as if she only realised for the first time that they *might* be taken away from her.

"'Do you see, Henry,' she said to her husband, 'how the number and ages of the children agree with ours?'

"'What did the little things die of, my child?' she asked Peggy.

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"'Fever I think mammy called it,' answered Peggy, 'but they were cold and hungry besides.'

"'Poor Mary!' said Mrs. Ogilvie again. 'Are you so *very* poor, then?' she added, to Peggy.

"'Oh, yes,' sighed Peggy, 'we've no chairs or tables, or anything but a bed.'

"'Why, what has become of them?' asked Daisy.

"'Daddy's pawned them,' answered Peggy, 'and spent the money on drink.'

"'Why, how do you live, my child?' asked Mrs. Ogilvie. 'Do you beg in the streets?'

"'No, never—mammy won't let me.'

"'There, papa!' said Daisy, 'I told you this little girl never begged. She didn't beg mamma for the money the other day; mamma gave it her.'

"'What did you do with the threepenny-bit?' asked Mrs. Ogilvie.

"'Daddy took it away from me, and spent it.'

"'What a wicked man!' exclaimed little Nelly. 'I can't bear that man.'

"'You mustn't say that,' said Peggy,

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gravely; 'Mammy would be very angry if she heard you.'

"'The same as ever!' said Mrs. Ogilvie. 'She never would hear a word against him. Do you know, Peggy,' she said, 'I want to ask you a few questions about your mother, because I think I used to know her.'

"'Oh, did you?' said Peggy. 'Are you—do you think you are—her old mistress?'

"I am almost sure of it, Peggy,' answered Mrs. Ogilvie. 'Has not your mother got a round face and a merry smile, sparkling eyes, and lots of bright hair; and is she not always singing and laughing?'

"'Oh, no!' said Peggy, 'that's not the least like mother. She's got a very thin pale face, and her eyes all sunk into holes; and she never laughs—ah! no; she hardly ever smiles, even. But then,' continued the child, 'I dare say she used, before she was so ill, and cold, and hungry. There isn't much to laugh at, you know, when you lie in bed all day coughing, or sitting up making shirts, with nothing to put over your shoulders.'

"'Poor little thing!' said Mrs. Ogilvie, laying

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her hand on Peggy's hair—'poor little thing! I'm very sorry to hear all this, Peggy—very sorry indeed. But still, I'm sure your mother is my maid, in spite of it. So you must run home and tell her that you have found me, and that I want her to come and see me the first thing to-morrow morning.'

"Peggy stepped back a few paces in her astonishment. 'Why, mammy hasn't been out of bed for weeks and weeks!' she said. "She can't even go to see daddy at the hospital!'

"'Why, what's the matter with *him?*' asked Mr. Ogilvie.

"'I don't know,' answered Peggy. 'Mammy only tells me he is very ill. It's something with a very long name. He was taken with it one night in the public-house, and was carried straight to the hospital. I heard the neighbours say it took four men to hold him.'

"[redacted]' whispered Mr. Ogilvie to his wife; but he did not lower his voice sufficiently, and Peggy overheard it.

"'That's the name!' she exclaimed. 'I heard old Timothy say it to the baker's wife.

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He comes very often to see Mammy, and to tell her how Daddy's getting on; but he hasn't been to-day, so Mammy sent me to the hospital to ask; and on my way back I couldn't help stopping to look up at the windows. So that's how it is I'm here."

"'And is your mother waiting all this time for an answer?' asked Mrs. Ogilvie.

"'Oh, dear! oh, dear! I quite forgot,' said Peggy, and she ran out of the room, and out of the house, before any one could stop her.

"Mr. Ogilvie pursued her, to ask her direction, and returned quite out of breath.

"'I had to run half-way down the street,' he said, 'before I could catch her, and even then she would hardly stop to speak to me, she was in such a fever to get back to her mother.'

"'Henry, dear,' said his wife, 'do you think I might go and see Mary?'

"'I hardly know what to say about it,' he answered. 'It is a wretched neighbourhood, and a street I never even heard of. But I'll tell you what I'll do, if you like. I'll go there myself, and see if it is a fit place for you to go

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to. I may as well go at once.' So he kissed his wife and children, and started off.

"After he was gone, the nurse fetched the baby away, and the school-room tea came up.

"The children could talk of nothing but Peggy.

"Mrs. Ogilvie sat by, rather thoughtful. I think she was comparing her own lot with that of her poor maid, and wondering why she should have been so highly favoured. Towards six o'clock she began to expect her husband back, but he did not come.

"The dressing-bell rang, and she went up to dress, followed by Daisy and Nelly; but as he did not arrive, she put off the dinner, and sat down by her dressing-room fire with her two little girls.

"Nelly's bedtime came, and then Daisy's, who, before she went, gave me into her mother's keeping; but it was past seven before Mr. Ogilvie came into the room.

"'Edward Gould is dead,' he said, as he sat down by the fire; 'he died of exhaustion following on the attack[redacted]

"'About an hour before his death he

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recovered consciousness, and asked for his wife.

"'I arrived at Mrs. Gould's just as the message came from the hospital, and as it was impossible for her to go, I advised her sending the little girl. I sat with her while the child was away, and she told me all her sad history.

"'It is just as you thought. Gould went from bad to worse, till they sunk to their present beggary.

"'It was very sad to hear her speak of her dead children, and of how a little care and money would have saved them.

"'She talked a great deal of you, Margaret, and of the days when she lived with you, which she seems to look back to as the happiest of her life.

"'She was so thankful that her husband should die sensible, and wish to see her, that it quite softened her grief.

"'She told me she knew it was better he should go; that it was impossible he could cure himself, and that his life was only a misery to him.

"'At the same time she excused him in

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every possible way, and tried to lay the blame of their present poverty on her own ill-health, and inability to help him to support the family.

"'Little Peggy came back towards seven, and told us all was over.

"'She stood by the bed, and repeated word for word the many messages with which her dying father had entrusted her, while the poor wife lay back with her eyes closed, drinking in every word.

"'He had bade her ask her mother to forgive him for all the misery he had caused her, and to tell her to pray that God would forgive him also.

"'Great was the poor woman's joy and thankfulness that he should have died in such a frame of mind.

"'"Thank God!'" she said, when the child had finished; "I can always think of him happily now as safe in heaven with Baby and little Moll. And I shall always see him as I last saw him, with Peggy in his arms, and his tears falling on her hair."

"'There was a kind sort of woman there, with her face tied up, who is going to stay to-night

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with the poor widow, and I promised to bring you to see her to-morrow.'

"'Poor Mary!' said Mrs. Ogilvie, when her husband paused, 'what a sad life hers has been! What can we do for her, Henry? I should so like to make her happy.'

"'I have been thinking about it on my way home,' he answered, 'and was rather puzzled. A poor woman so out of health as she is cannot do much to support herself and a child. But just as I got to the door a plan came into my head.'

"'Oh, what was it?' asked his wife eagerly.

"'Before we left home, he answered, 'the lodge-keeper gave warning, because he has outgrown the house, and I have not yet found a substitute. Why should we not establish Mrs. Gould there, and let her take in washing and needlework?'

"'The very thing,' said Mrs. Ogilvie; 'how clever of you to think of it! I am sure she would soon get strong in our fresh country air; and I could have her under my own eye, and take care of her.'

"Mr. Ogilvie then went to his room to dress,

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and his wife lighted her candle and went to a cupboard where the money-box was kept. She dropped me in, and shut it up again.

"I heard her call out to her husband that she was going to see the children in bed, but that she would be back directly.

"The dressing-room door banged, and I was left to imagine how she would bend her head over each little bed, and kiss each little sleeper.

"I could fancy that she would linger a minute longer than usual at the cribs that contained little Nell and the baby, and that a prayer of thankfulness would be breathed over their little heads that she had been spared such a trial as it had pleased God to inflict on her poor maid Mary."

CHAPTER XII.

"Of all dull places for a wretched threepenny to be shut up in, is a money-box! And a money-box, too, which is kept in a cupboard—so that one can neither see nor hear.

"It must have been five weeks or more that was condemned to lie in Daisy and Nelly's

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savings-box, the silence and dulness being only now and then varied by a penny or some other coin dropping through the slit and coming thumping down upon me.

"How I longed for the box to be full! At last, when we were all jammed so tightly together that we could hardly move, the long-wished-for day arrived.

"The box was taken out and carried down stairs.

"I never could make out at the time what it was that happened to us; but I have since discovered we took a railway journey, at the end of which the box which contained us, was shut up in another cupboard.

"Another weary month followed, and then the release came!

"The box was taken out and carried carefully in somebody's hand. I could not hear a sound, because I was nearly at the bottom of the box, with any number of pennies on the top of me; but I felt we were out of doors, and either walking or driving along a road.

"In a little while we stopped, and presently I felt an instrument scratching the box. I

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guessed it was a chisel, and that the money-box was being broken open.

"As the lid came gradually off, many familiar voices sounded in my ear. The box was turned topsy-turvy, and out we all rolled helter-skelter.

"There was a great clapping of hands at the sight, and then we were gathered in heaps by eager fingers, and counted by excited voices.

"I was dazzled at first by the daylight, having been in darkness so long, but as soon as I recovered myself I looked round me, and this is what I saw.

"I was in a neat little cottage, with lattice windows, evidently the lodge of a park, for through the open door I saw white gates and sloping green grass.

"It was early spring, for the hedges outside were covered with blossoms, and the sun was shining brightly.

"Standing up by the mantelpiece was Mrs. Ogilvie, and in an arm-chair by the fire, neatly dressed in black, and with a widow's cap on, was Peggy's mother! By the table, counting as hard as they could count, were Daisy and

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Nelly, and between them was Peggy herself—not the ragged little shivering Peggy that I remembered, but a neat little Peggy, with a black frock, spotlessly clean pinafore, and white sun-bonnet.

"But the dear little face, I remembered, looked the same as ever: only that the brown eyes were sparkling as I had never seen them sparkle before, and the whole face glowing with health and happiness.

"If Peggy had looked sunny in the dark old days that were past, she was a very sunbeam now.

"The door opened, and Mr. Ogilvie came in.

"'How are you to-day, Mary?' he said, advancing to the widow. 'Busy at work, I see, as usual?'

"'Yes, sir,' she answered, smiling, 'busy at Master Harry's shirts. They're such little things that I shall soon have them done now; and I've been making him a doll out of the rags, too. Is he coming down the road?'

"'I saw the perambulator just now,' answered Mr. Ogilvie, turning to the door. 'Ah! here he is.' And in trotted the baby, grown

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quite independent, and ran straight up to Mrs. Gould.

"'Ah! who spoils Harry?' said Mrs. Ogilvie, as the child climbed into the widow's lap, and received the expected rag soldier from her hands.

"He put his little fat arms round her neck to thank her, and pressed his little red mouth to her cheek.

"'I never knew anything like his devotion to you, Mary,' said Mrs. Ogilvie. 'It is always "Baby go and see Mary!" all day long. I think I shall get jealous!'

"She laughed as she spoke, but a pitying look stole over her gentle face as she saw how eagerly the widow returned the little fellow's caresses, for she knew he reminded her of her own baby-boy.

"Meantime Mr. Ogilvie was helping to count the money, and his announcement of the sum total was received with a shout of applause.

"'Now, then,' said he, 'the great day has come, and you have got to settle what you will buy.'

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"'It has been settled a long time,' cried both his little daughters.

"'What! has Nelly really fixed once for all? Which is it to be, Nell—the doll, or the pump, or the baby-house?'

"'None of them,' answered little Nelly; 'it's a great, great secret, Papa, and no one knows it but Daisy and me, and Mamma and Peggy.'

"'But I think we might tell papa,' said Daisy; 'don't you, mamma? May I tell him?'

"'Yes, darling,' said her mother, 'by all means tell him.'

"Daisy stood on tiptoe, and whispered something in her father's ear. It seemed to please him very much, for he kissed her forehead and said, 'What dear little things you are! Whose thought was that?'

"'Mine,' whispered Daisy, blushing.

"'Daisy, let me tell Mary,' implored Nelly; 'I'm sure it's time to tell now.'

"'Yes,' said her sister, 'you may tell now. Don't you think so, Peggy?'

"But Peggy was far too excited to answer. She ran up to her mother and kissed her, then

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took Daisy's hand and squeezed it, and then jumped about the room.

"'Mary,' said little Nelly, in a most important voice, walking up to the widow, 'I'm going to tell you.'

"'Well, Miss Nelly, dear,' said the widow, smiling, 'I'm listening.'

"'Yes,' repeated Nelly, 'the secret's over now, and I'm going to tell you.'

"'Oh, be quick, Miss Nelly, *please*,' exclaimed Peggy, quivering with excitement.

"Nelly resumed: 'All that money, Mary,' she said, pointing to the little heaps on the table, 'is going to buy back your shawl which was——'

"Here Nelly paused for the right word, and looked inquiringly at Peggy.

"'Pawned,' said Peggy, breathlessly.

"'*Pawed*,' repeated Nelly, turning back to the widow. 'I don't understand what it means, but it is something dreadful, I know.'

"'Let me tell the rest,' uttered Peggy, springing forward, and throwing her arms round her mother's neck. 'Mammy, mammy, you'll get it back—you will indeed. My old

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man is going to get it—he is really. He says it's gone from the shop, but the man knows who has got it, and the other man will give it up to the man, and my old man's going to bring it himself. He's coming to-day, Mammy; the cart's gone to meet him at the station, and he'll be here any minute. Oh, Mammy, Mammy! isn't it nice?'

"And Peggy gave her mother three violent kisses, and then, wild with excitement, she bounded to the door, and, followed by Daisy and Nelly, ran down the road, singing—

> "'Oh! what fun,
> To have a plum bun!
> How I wish it never was done!'

"Peggy's accounts were never of the clearest, and she left her mother looking rather mystified between 'the man,' and 'the other man,' and 'my old man;' but Mrs. Gould was so taken up with apologising to Mr. and Mrs. Ogilvie for the child's wild behaviour, that she had not time to think about it.

"'You'll excuse her, Miss Margaret,' she said; 'she's not used to be with gentlefolks, and don't know how to behave.'

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"'Don't stop her for worlds, Mary,' said Mrs. Ogilvie; 'her spirits and impetuosity amuse me beyond everything. It is delightful to see anything look so bright and happy, and reminds me of what you used to be in the old days.'

"'She is a dear little thing,' said Mr. Ogilvie; 'and how well she looks since she has been down here.'

"'She's a different child, sir,' answered Mrs. Gould.. 'The narrow alley in which we lived was enough to kill any one; but this beautiful country air has made her rosy and strong. She was always a happy child, through all our troubles; but since we've been down here, she's wild with happiness. She'd never seen the green fields before, and it seems as if she would never tire of running about in the grass, and gathering the flowers and blossoms.'

"'Did you understand what she told you about the shawl, Mary?' asked Mrs. Ogilvie.

"'Well, not very clearly, Miss Margaret,' answered the widow.

"So Mrs. Ogilvie told her how Daisy and Nelly had settled to let their savings go to

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getting the shawl out of pawn. They had not at first intended to let Peggy into the secret, but had found it necessary to do so, as they did not know the address of the pawnbroker. They had then requested their mother to write the letter for them, which she had accordingly done.

"Great was the dismay when days went by, and no answer arrived. Peggy had then suggested writing to old Timothy Craig, and asking him to go to the shop.

"Old Craig had not answered either for a few days; but a letter had arrived at last, in which he informed Mrs. Ogilvie that the shawl was sold.

"But before the little girls had recovered from their disappointment, another letter arrived, announcing that old Craig had traced the shawl, and persuaded the owner to give it up for the same sum he had originally paid for it.

"'And so,' concluded Mrs. Ogilvie, 'I wrote and asked Mr. Craig to bring it down himself, thinking he would like to see his old friend Peggy again, and I promised to pay his journey. I must confess, though, that I had another reason

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for wishing him to come down here, though I am not sure it is a very sensible one.'

"'What is that, Margaret?' asked her husband.

"'Well,' rejoined she, 'to begin from the very beginning. You know Peggy's story of her night with old Craig in the public-house, that the children are so fond of?'

"'That I do,' said Mr. Ogilvie, 'and I am something like them myself, for I am never tired of hearing Peggy tell it.'

"'And you remember his allusions to his ungrateful daughter?'

"'Yes, certainly.'

"'Well, I think my maid Craig is the publican's daughter.'

"'Nonsense!' exclaimed Mr. Ogilvie.

"'It really is not nonsense,' said his wife. 'I have thought it might be the case from the similarity of the name, which is not a common one; but I never said anything about it, for fear of being thought fanciful. However, the other day Craig happened to be in the room when Peggy was talking about her adventures, and seeing that she was rather attracted by the

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story, I questioned her closely, and the result is that I have no doubt it is as I thought.

"'It seems he has been a very bad old man, and she is evidently rather ashamed of her parentage; but at the same time she owns he was always the kindest of fathers to her.

"'I told her how wrongly I thought she had behaved, and she cried bitterly, and said she never knew he had been starving, or she would have gladly shared her wages with him. Besides, she says he has changed his dwelling-place so often in the last seven or eight years, that she had quite lost sight of him, and really had not an idea where he was living.'

"'And does she wish to see him again?' asked Mr. Ogilvie.

"'Well, no,' answered his wife, 'I think she is afraid he would not see her now. She says she does not think he would ever forgive her. He is very violent, she tells me, and I really think the poor girl is frightened to death at him.'

"'But still, I think if an accidental meeting were contrived, it might be a very good thing. I want to take the children home as soon as they have just seen this celebrated old man,

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and to leave you, Mary, and Peggy alone with him for a little while. Then I will send Craig down with a message to you, and the father and daughter will find themselves face to face.'

"Mrs. Gould entered into the plan with something of Peggy's enthusiasm, and Mr. Ogilvie got up, laughing, and said good-bye.

"'Well, I shall be off,' he said, 'out of the way of all these scenes and meetings; only mind, Mary, you send Peggy up to the house afterwards to tell us how it has all gone off.'

"Mrs. Ogilvie and Mrs. Gould remained talking together for some time after he went, till they were disturbed by the three little girls rushing into the cottage, bearing the shawl between them.

"While they were busy putting it over the widow's shoulders, I looked up, and saw my old friend the publican standing in the doorway.

"He had dressed himself very neatly, and as he stood there, smiling kindly on the children, he did not look very formidable, and I wondered his daughter should be afraid of him.

"'Oh! how I should like to see your shawl and Mammy's together, ma'am!' said Peggy to

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Mrs. Ogilvie, when the first excitement was over.

"'I will send my maid down with it presently,' said Mrs. Ogilvie, with more eagerness in her manner than the occasion seemed to warrant, 'and then you will see how alike they are.'

"'Who did you say you would send with it, mamma?' asked Daisy.

"'My maid, dear.'

"'Craig?' questioned the pertinacious Daisy.

"'I beg your pardon, Miss,' said the publican, starting, 'did you speak to me?'

"Come, children,' said Mrs. Ogilvie, hurriedly, 'we must go home. Call nurse to put Harry in his perambulator.

"'But before I go,' she added, turning to the publican, 'I must thank you very much for the trouble you have taken in finding the shawl. I hope you will spend the rest of the day here; I am sure Peggy has a great deal to tell you.'

"Old Timothy was not very ready with his answer. He stood twirling his cap round and round, and looking rather sheepish.

"I thank ye, ma'am, I thank ye,' he said at last.

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"Mrs. Ogilvie, nurse, and Baby started off, but Nelly and Daisy were still busy looking at the publican.

"To them he was so mixed up with Peggy's 'fairy-story-kind-of-a-dream,' that he was a mysterious person, and Nelly stared at him with her great blue eyes on one side, while Daisy gazed fixedly at him on the other.

"He looked rather confused at finding himself the object of such close inspection.

"'Little fairies,' he said at last, looking down upon them with a smile, 'what can ye find to look at in a little old man like me?'

"The word 'fairies' recalled to their minds another of his reputed charms, and little Nelly said, coaxingly, 'You'll tell us a lot of fairy stories, *won't* you?'

"But cries of 'Miss Margaret!' 'Miss Eleanor!' came from nurse in the distance, and the little girls were obliged to run off.

"Unfortunately for me, Mrs. Gould at once gave old Craig all the money on the table in payment for the shawl, and he put us into his trousers pocket; so I saw and heard nothing more for an hour."

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CHAPTER XIII.

"PEGGY was sitting on the publican's lap, and Mrs. Gould leaning back in her chair, working, when I made my appearance again.

"He had pulled me out of his pocket, and was holding me between his finger and thumb.

"'Would you like another threepenny, little 'un?' he said, smiling.

"Peggy received me with great delight into her hand (little thinking I was the same who had lived there so much), and put me into her mother's open workbox for safety.

"'You're going to tell me another fairy story, Timmy, *aint* you?' she said, coaxingly, as she climbed up into his lap again.

"'There's a knock at the door,' said Mrs. Gould, rather nervously, and she went to open it.

"'The lady's maid, I believe?' she said, interrogatively. 'Come in, please.'

"'Oh, it's the shawl,' exclaimed Peggy, running to the door; 'please bring it to the table, and put it down by the other. Now, Timmy, you'll see how alike they are.'

"A nice-looking young woman, with fair

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hair, advanced into the room, and began to do as she was requested. 'Mrs. Ogilvie told me,' she began, but she stopped short when she caught sight of the publican. At the sound of her voice, he looked up—and their eyes met.

"And now I witnessed the same convulsion I had noticed the night when Peggy had first said 'Daddy' in her sleep.

"He remained gazing at the new comer, spell-bound, with the same marvellous softness stealing all over his face.

"Back to the days of his daughter's childhood his thoughts leapt at one bound.

"Back to the days, so long ago, when the innocent face and childish prattle had done so much towards reclaiming him from a life of vice and irreligion; had done so much towards teaching him that innocence, and love, and heaven, were not so entirely out of reach as he had imagined.

"He forgot all that had passed between—forgot the years of coldness and neglect, forgot his wounded pride and cruel disappointment in the failure of the one thing he had believed in; and he stretched out his arms to his

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daughter, crying, 'Is it you, Susie—my little Susie?'

"But the next moment his whole expression changed, and the old look of anger and excitement came into his face.

"'That's her!' he said, turning to Peggy, 'that's my fine lady-daughter! That's the gal who has lived in grand places, and fed upon the fat of the land, while her father's been starving! Yes, that's her! She didn't know her old good-for-nothing of a father was here, or it would have been precious long before she'd have set her foot in the place!

"'How dare you come face to face with me?' he went on, shaking his fist at his trembling daughter; 'how dare you? Go away this moment! Get out, I say! Go back to your fine servants' halls and housekeepers' rooms, and make yourself happy with your grand cooks and butlers, and all the rest of the beggars on horseback! And, Peggy, mind you don't tell any of 'em that the lady's maid's father is your old friend the publican. Oh, no! let her keep that a secret, as she's done it so long!'

"The old man was quite transported with

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fury. His eyes sparkled, and his lips were white with passion.

"His daughter shrank from him in terror, and sank upon a chair, weeping convulsively. Mrs. Gould fetched her a glass of water, and made him an entreating sign to say no more.

"Peggy, who had listened with the greatest attention, now laid her hand on the publican's arm, and said, 'Don't be so cross to her, Timmy; I'm sure she's very sorry!'

"He softened a little at the child's caressing touch, and seeing her advantage, Peggy went on:

"'I don't quite understand it, Timmy,' she said, 'and I want you to explain. Is that the girl you used to tell the fairy tales to?'

"'Aye, aye,' he said, bitterly, 'that's her.'

"'Don't get cross again, Timmy, *please*,' entreated Peggy. 'But I thought you told me once she was dead and buried.'

"'I wish she was!' he exclaimed. 'It would have been far better for me if she had died when she was an innocent little 'un like you, and had never growed up to be hard and cruel. For then I could ha' gone and cried over her little grave, and the thought of her, and the hope of

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a-meetin' of her in heaven, would ha' kept me straight.'

"It seemed as if he revolted from the thought of his bad life, and as if it were a relief to have some one on whom to lay the blame of it, for he went on, with increasing excitement:

"'But, instead of that, the thought of her has driven me farther and farther away from all that's holy, and made me well-nigh believe there was no such things as love and goodness at all—till I found you, Peggy!—till I found you!

"'You wouldn't believe, dearie,' he said, gently stroking the child's bright hair, 'how I loved that gal! I broke my poor wife's heart, I believe, with my ways: and that was the beginning of my being so fond of the child, for I wanted to make it up to her mother, like.

"'I saved and scraped to get the gal better clothed and better taught than the neighbours' children, because I thought she was too good to be like them. And this is the end of it!

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"'Are you going, Susan?' he said, raising his voice, but not looking at his daughter; 'because, if you aint, I am.'

"The poor girl tried to answer, but her voice was choked with sobs.

"Mrs. Gould came to the rescue.

"'Timothy Craig,' she said, gently, 'you're not behaving fair. It's true your daughter has not been all she ought to you, but she's very sorry for it now. Besides, she never knew you was starving, or, she says, she'd have shared her wages with you, and welcome. And then, the last two years, she didn't know where to find you.'

"'Did she ever try?' he asked, scornfully. 'Did she ever try?'

"The girl whispered something, and Mrs. Gould bent down to hear her.

"'She says she did,' said the widow, 'but she never could hear anything of you.'

"'Gammon!' he muttered.

"Mrs. Gould was in despair; it seemed useless attempting to move him.

"She beckoned to Peggy, and whispered to her, to see what she could do.

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"'No one can resist Peggy,' was her inward reflection.

"'Timmy,' said Peggy, walking straight up to him, 'is it true that you are an old good-for-nothing?'

"'Who says so?' he asked, harshly.

"'Why, you said so yourself,' laughed the child, 'only a few minutes ago.'

"'Did I?' he said, softening again. 'Yes, it's quite true, Peggy; it's quite true.'

"'Timmy,' she questioned again, 'do you ever say "Our Father?"'

"He did not answer for a minute, and then he said, in a very low voice, 'I can't say I do, dearie; I can't say I do.'

"'I thought not!' said Peggy, quietly.

"'Why did you think not?' he asked rather sharply.

"'Oh, because there's a bit in it where we ask God to forgive us what we've done wrong, as we forgive other people what they have done wrong to us. So if you can't forgive your daughter for all she's done to you, why of course you can't expect God to forgive you for being an old good-for-nothing; *can* you?'

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"But Peggy waited in vain for an answer.

"The old man sat down on the chair, and covered his face with his hands.

"When he removed them, his daughter was kneeling at his feet.

"'Daddy! daddy! won't you forgive me?'

"And as he took her in his arms, he turned to Peggy and said—

"'*For your sake, dearie; for your sake!*'

"There is little more to tell.

"The publican went back to London, but it was only to pack up his things and dispose of his business.

"A few weeks after saw him established in a little two-roomed cottage in the village, in the windows of which might be seen bottles of ginger-beer, Persian sherbet, lollypops, and other articles likely to tempt the youth of a country village, and here, supported partly by his daughter, and partly by the sale of his goods, he lived a happy and respectable life.

"The greatest treat Mrs. Ogilvie could give her children on their half-holidays was to allow

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them to go down with Susan Craig to spend a penny or two at old Timothy's.

"But their pleasure was not half complete unless they stopped at the lodge on their way to pick up a certain little bright-eyed creature in a white sun-bonnet, who would be standing there waiting for them on the tiptoe of expectation. Not only because they loved her company (though that in itself was a great pleasure), but because they knew they were surer of a heartier welcome from old Timothy if she were with them; that the measures would be freer, and the fairy tales longer, if she were present to share in them; and that when he or Susan said it was time to stop, and that they must be going home, a word from Peggy would silence the daughter and set the father going again.

"Happy days those! Glorious summer evenings that the children will always remember and look back to!

"I recollect the last time I went with them, before I parted with Peggy. It was a beautiful evening, and the air heavy with the perfumes of flowers.

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"They had unwillingly said good-bye to old Timothy, and strolled home, talking over the marvellous stories he had been telling them.

"When they came to the gate, Mrs. Gould came out to speak to Daisy and Nelly, and to send a message to little Harry.

"Her pretty brown hair, neatly braided, under her widow's cap, looked almost as bright as Peggy's, and she had a faint colour on her cheek.

"She was wrapped in her shawl, which she never failed to put over her shoulders when the children passed through the gate.

"The little girls remained chattering gaily for some minutes, and then went on, turning round every minute to kiss their hands and call out 'good-bye.'

"Mother and child remained gazing after them.

"Softly the birds in the trees around them twittered their last good-night; across the distant meadows came the sound of the haymakers' voices, as they wended their way home; the sun was setting in its

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glory, and the young moon beginning to rise.

"The widow put her arm round Peggy's neck. 'Isn't it beautiful, my lamb?' she said.

"'Oh, mammy dear!' answered the child, 'I am so happy! so happy! I think I'm too happy to speak!'

"'And it's only six months ago,' said the mother, drawing the child closer to her, 'that I lay awake all through that dreadful night, thinking my darling was lost to me for ever.'

"'Were you crying, Mammy?' asked the child, wistfully.

"'Yes, Peggy.'

"'Then the text I learnt to-day in school has come true, mammy! I *wish* you'd known it then.'

"'What was it, dearie?'

"And Peggy repeated, slowly and carefully, 'Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.'"

The children sat very quiet after the Threepenny bit had finished his story, thinking over what they had heard.

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"You haven't forgotten your promise, papa, I hope?" said Tiney, presently.

"What promise?" asked papa.

"Why, that the Sovereign should tell his history," said Tiney. "There's lots of time before tea; so please do, papa."

Papa smiled, and took up the Sovereign, looked at it for a few moments, and then began.

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THE

STORY OF THE SOVEREIGN.

"So you want to hear what has happened to me all my life? Well, I will try and remember, and I will begin my story, as I know children like, from the very beginning.

"It is a long while since I was a bright new sovereign, as you may see. I am old, and battered, and discoloured now; but you could not wish to see a more beautiful piece of gold than I was when I first came out of the Mint.

"Do you know what the Mint is? It is the place where money is coined. I could tell you a great deal about it, only I am afraid you would think it dull.

"You would begin to yawn and fidget in your chairs, and say to yourselves, 'I wish this part

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were over, and that the story would begin.' At least, I should think you would say it quite to yourselves, for I hope you would be ashamed to say it out loud.

"Foolish children! I really believe you would go on spending sovereigns and shillings till you were quite grown-up, without caring to know where the gold and silver came from, or how the money was made.

"Remember I am only speaking to *some* of you. I know very well that one or two among you have more sense, and may often be seen poring over easy books about machinery and manufactories. And even though you may not be able to read yourselves, you like to look at pictures of steam-engines, and printing-presses, and coining-machines, and works of all kinds, and to ask your papa or your mamma to explain to you what it all means.

"This is the way to learn and to get on, depend upon it. It is not only the spelling-books and maps that teach boys and girls. It is the having our eyes open to what is going on around us, and the wish to understand the many curious things we see about us.

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"But I am afraid the rest of you care very little for anything but amusing yourselves. Well, I suppose you will be thinking me a very lecturing old sovereign, and wishing I would stop. But I have not quite done yet.

"When you are as old as I am, and have travelled about as much, and watched, as I have done, all the many mistakes children make, and which they are so sorry for afterwards, you would long, as I do, to warn other children against making the same mistakes, that so they may escape from the same sorrow.

"You know I cannot speak, I cannot move, and I cannot do anything to show people I am there.

"You don't know how sad it has been sometimes to see people doing things I knew they ought not to do; to hear people saying things I knew they ought not to say; things which I knew they would afterwards give worlds not to have done and said; and yet not to be able, by word, or look, or sign, to point out to them their folly and wickedness.

"There have been times when a word from me would have saved a child from sin; there

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have been times when I could have held back a child from danger; there have been times when a look from me would have reminded a child of what he had been taught was right; and I had no tongue to speak with, no arm to stretch out, no eye to raise.

"I want, therefore, children, to show you how thankful you ought to be that you can speak, and move, and look, so that you may help others in difficulty, danger, or temptation.

"And I can do this best by showing you how hard it has been for me to feel myself so useless, powerless, and helpless to prevent the sin and misery I have seen around me.

"I was very unlike the poor, worn-out thing I am now, when I was handed, among other change for a five-pound note, to a fat old gentleman, who came to the Bank where I had been sent after I was coined

"It was just about Christmas time, and I heard him say, 'Give me some new sovereigns; they are useful this time of year for presents for the children.'

"Then the banker said something about 'Christmas presents,' 'New Year's gifts,' 'Christ-

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mas trees,' 'Christmas stockings,' and a great deal more that I knew nothing about; but I dare say you, children, understand all about it.

"But what puzzled me most was to hear the banker say, as he put me down on the counter, 'A new sovereign makes a capital Christmas-box.'

"How *I*, a sovereign, could be made into a box, I could not understand.

"I knew what a box was, for I had been kept in one for some days; and I knew it was a thing that opened and shut.

"But how could they open and shut *me?*

"I was thinking about it all the way as I went along in the fat gentleman's waistcoat-pocket, and it bothered me. Should I be broken? Should I be hurt?

"As I was going over these things in my mind, my owner stopped at a little shop, and went in. 'I have come to settle my little account,' said he; 'I have not brought the bill, so, perhaps you will make it out again for me.'

"'Certainly, sir,' said the shopman; and

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after a few minutes, during which I heard the scratching of a pen upon paper, he said, 'One pound three shillings, if you please, sir.'

"Into the waistcoat-pocket came a great hand, and I was drawn out and laid upon the counter with three new shillings, who, like me, had just come from the Bank. 'Good evening,' said my fat friend, and he marched out of the shop.

"The shopman threw me down upon the counter to see if I was good.

"Me! a bright sovereign just fresh from the Bank. I was so offended with the man that I jumped right off the counter, and rolled into a little dark corner, from whence I enjoyed hearing him searching in vain for me.

"'Children,' I heard him call out, 'come and look for a sovereign I have dropped.'

"Then I heard the clatter of several little voices, and the patter of several little feet.

"I longed to be in the possession of these little creatures, and shone as hard as I could.

"'Ah! here it is,' said a little voice.

"A soft hand closed over me, and I was carried into the back room. 'That's right,

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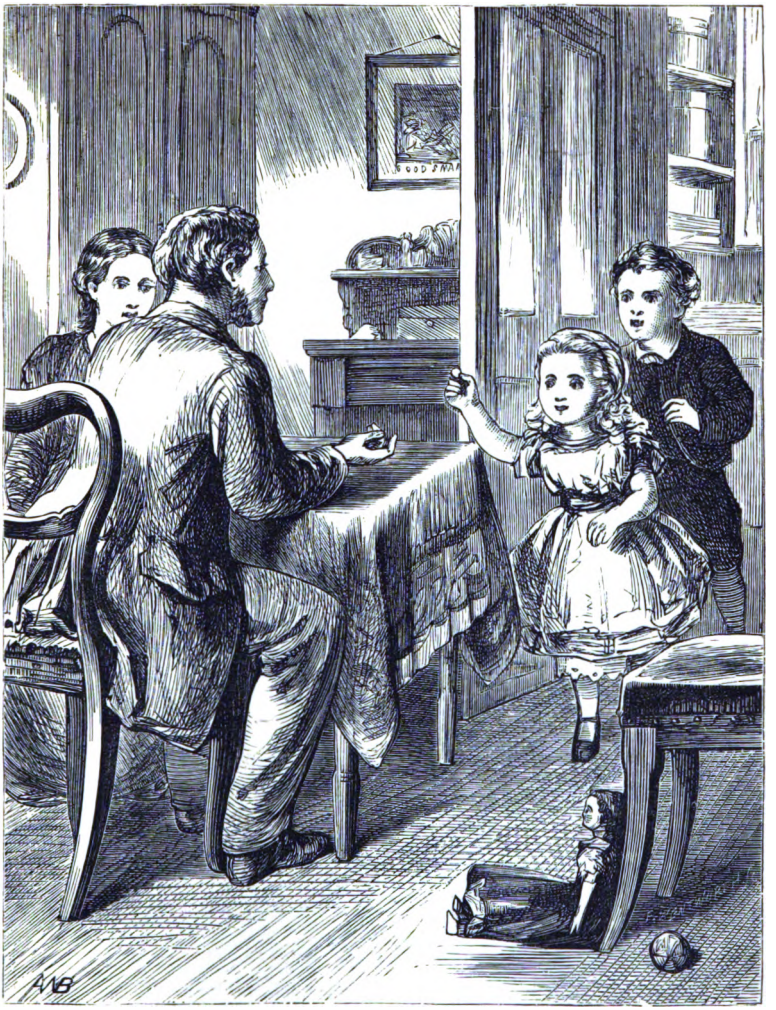

THE SOVEREIGN ENTERS THE LITTLE BACK ROOM. *Page* 162.

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Mary,' said the father, 'and, for a reward, here is a new shilling for you.'

"Mary put me down on the table, and advanced in great delight to receive her shilling; and then there was a consultation with her brothers as to how it should be spent; and there was no end to the things it was to buy.

"While they were talking, I was looking about me, and trying to make out the family into which I had been brought. There was the father, the mother, and two little boys, whose names I discovered to be Arthur and Jack.

"Arthur and Jack were six and seven, and Mary was only five.

"Mary was fair, and had blue eyes, and the boys had dark eyes and dark hair, only Jack's was curly, and Arthur's was quite straight.

"Jolly little boys they were both, and very merry.

"They made almost too much noise sometimes for the small back room, and every now and then I heard their father say, 'Gently, boys, gently; remember your mother has a headache.'

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"I noticed that they always became quieter when this was said; but they soon forgot it, and broke out again.

"'Old Mr. Smith has paid his bill at last, you see,' Mr. Norton said to his wife in an under tone.

"'I am so glad,' she answered; 'we can take our little outing now without any scruples.'

"'One pound three,' continued Mr. Norton. 'I have given Mary one shilling; shall I give the other two to the boys? It will be all the Christmas presents they will get, poor children.'

"'Do, dear,' replied Mrs. Norton, 'it will be such a delight to them.'

"The boys were called, and presented with their shillings; and great were the rejoicings that ensued.

"'To-morrow we shall be buying presents all day,' said Arthur, when the first excitement had somewhat subsided.

"'It will be a whole holiday, because it is Christmas Eve,' said Jack, jumping about on one leg.

"'Shall I be able to buy presents for every-

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body with my shilling?' asked Mary; 'for father, and mother, and Arthur, and Jack?'

"'Yes, dear,' said her mother, 'you can divide a shilling into four parts, and buy a present with each part. Now, boys, which can tell me how much each part will cost?'

"Arthur began to think directly, and Jack began to count on his fingers, but neither could tell.

"'Oh, I don't know,' said Arthur, at last; 'and I want to think about something else; so Jack must tell you.'

"'Oh, *I* don't know,' said Jack, shaking his curly head; 'and I don't like sums, they give me a headache.'

"Everybody laughed at the idea of Jack having a headache; for Jack had never been ill in his life; and was always laughing, and whistling, and hopping about on one leg.

"'No one but mother is allowed to have a headache,' said Mary; 'and you've always got one; haven't you, dear mother?' she added, stealing up to Mrs. Norton, and kissing her hand.

"'Is it a *great* privilege, Mary?' said her

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mother, smiling a little sadly, as she stroked the little girl's hair.

"'I don't know what privilege means; but I think it is rather grand,' said Mary.

"'A piece of grandeur poor mother would gladly do without," said the children's father.

"Shall I have headaches when I grow up?' asked Mary.

"'I hope not, darling,' said Mrs. Norton. 'By the way, talking of aches; how is your tooth, Mary?'

"'It has not ached so *very* much to-day,' said the little thing; 'but every now and then it shoots; not like yesterday, though. Oh! that was dreadful!'

"'Poor child!' said her mother, tenderly; 'it was very bad yesterday; but you were a brave little girl, and did not make much fuss.'

"'Did you cry, Mary?' asked Jack, eagerly.

"'I could not help it, indeed, Jack,' answered his little sister; 'it was so very bad.'

"'There!' exclaimed Jack, triumphantly.

"'It's all very well, Master Jack,' said Mr. Norton; 'you don't know what a toothache is. I suspect if you had such a thing, we should

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hear you halloaing all over the house. Mary bears pain as well as most people, I know.'

"'Except mother,' put in little Mary; 'for I can't help telling her when I have a toothache, and we never can tell when she has a headache; because she never complains.'

"'My darling,' said Mrs. Norton, 'I should know if you had a toothache whether you told me or not; you could not hide it from me.'

"'I wonder why,' reflected Mary; 'don't you wonder, Jack, why we can't hide our aches from mother, and she can always hide her headaches from us?'

"'Shall I tell you why?' said Mr. Norton; 'because your mother loves her children more than they love her.'

"He was interrupted by a burst of indignation from Mary and Jack, who, throwing their arms round their mother, protested that they loved her more than they could say; and that it was *quite, quite* impossible she should love them better.

"Mr. Norton looked on, smiling, while the storm lasted; but Mrs. Norton, while she fondly returned her children's caresses, was

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looking anxiously at her eldest boy, as if to ask him why he did not join in his brother and sister's affectionate demonstrations.

"But Arthur sat by the fire, absorbed in thought, and took no part in the conversation.

"'Well,' proceeded Mr. Norton, when the first excitement had somewhat subsided, 'now if you will listen, I will go on with what I was going to say.'

"'If you love a person very, very much, you think a great deal more about that person than you do about yourself. Now Arthur has got his head full of one thing, Jack has got his full of another thing, and Mary has got hers full of another thing; so, while they are all thinking about these different things that interest them, they forget to think about their mother's headache.'

"'But mother has got her head so full of Arthur and Jack and Mary, that *she* forgets to think about herself. Do you understand?'

"The children understood well enough; but they did not like it, for all that.

"Jack looked down, and fidgeted with his

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jacket buttons, and Mary looked very grave indeed.

"'I did not mean to make you sad, darlings,' said their father; 'but only to make you understand what a blessing it is to have a mother who loves and cares for you so much. There may be many a poor little child in the cold streets to-night, who may be suffering all kinds of pain that no one cares to find out about, who has no mother to see in a minute what is the matter, and to do her best to comfort and cure him.'

"'I shall never think of anything but mother's headaches again,' said Mary, presently.

"'No more shall I; never,' said Jack.

"'Well, that is promising a great deal,' said Mr. Norton, laughing; 'you need not do that, my children. Think of anything and everything you like, and enjoy all the blessings and pleasures with which God has surrounded you; *only* don't be so taken up with your own interests as to forget other people, more especially your dear mother. You, Jack, for instance, give up your noisy games when she wants to

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be quiet; and you, Mary, try and busy yourself with your little employments, without disturbing her every minute for advice and help. But don't think you are neglecting her because you cannot always be thinking of her. No, no, my darlings; that would be expecting too much of such little people."

"'And, besides,' whispered Mrs. Norton, 'I have your father to take care of me. *He* always knows when I have a headache, doesn't he?'

"'Yes,' said Jack, 'father always knows; and tells us not to make a noise. We have sometimes felt rather cross—haven't we, Mary?—when he has said, "Don't make a noise!" in the middle of our games; but we will never feel cross again; will we, Mary?'

"'No; never,' said Mary.

"The clock now struck seven; and the two youngest children were told to say good night. Mr. Norton carried Mary up to bed, and Jack followed close behind, shutting the door very quietly after him, instead of giving it a bang as he generally did.

"'Arthur, my darling,' said Mrs. Norton to her eldest boy, as soon as they were alone,

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'what have you been thinking about all the evening?'

"Arthur pushed back his chair from the fire, and came up to the sofa.

"'I have been thinking about spending Christmas Day at grandfather's, in the country, mother.'

"'Is your head very full of it, dear?' she said, rather anxiously.

"'Quite full, mother; I can think of nothing else.'

"'I was afraid so,' said Mrs. Norton, half sighing. 'I almost wish, Arthur,' she went on, taking the boy's hand in hers, 'that you did not let your heart get so set upon things.'

"'For fear I should be disappointed,' said Arthur, looking up quickly, and rather suspiciously.

"'Not only that,' she answered; 'but because anything that gets hold of us so completely as to fix our thoughts on ourselves, to the exclusion of other people, is apt to make us selfish. Now, this evening, for instance, you have been sitting by the fire so entirely engrossed in your own thoughts, that I don't

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believe you even heard what we were all saying.'

"Arthur was obliged to own this was true.

"'Exactly,' said his mother. 'When I asked you to tell me how many presents Mary could buy with her shilling, you were too much occupied to take the trouble to do the little sum. Was not that selfish? Well, then, again, about Mary's toothache——'

"'Has Mary had a toothache?' interrupted Arthur, surprised.

"'A very bad one, poor little thing,' answered Mrs. Norton; 'which, if you had not been so taken up with yourself, you would have heard us all talking about. Is not this being selfish?'

"'But, mother,' urged Arthur, anxious to excuse himself, 'it is such an old promise about spending Christmas Day at grandfather's, in the country, and I have been looking forward to it so long that I can't help thinking a great deal about it. I do so want, mother, to make slides in the ruts, and to hear grandfather's stories over the fire in the evening. When I think about it, I can quite see him sitting in 's chair in the chimney-corner, in the cosy

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little kitchen, with his hands on his stick, and we all sitting round the fire.'

"'You have pictured it very well, Arthur, considering you have never seen it,' she said, smiling; but the remembrance of her old home, thus conjured up before her eyes by her own child, brought a light to her eye, and a flush to her pale cheek.

"'You have told me about it so often, mother, that I cannot help thinking I have been there.'

"'Dear old home!' she said half to herself; 'every Christmas since I married I have longed to go, but there has never been money enough for the journey. It is only by saving and scraping, Arthur, that we have got enough this year. The tickets there and back, for five of us, will be a sovereign, and that is a great deal to spend on pleasure.'

"'But still we *are* going to spend it, mother,' said the boy, anxiously.

"'My darling, your father and I would deny ourselves anything to give our children pleasure: and though affairs have been going very badly lately, and the shop not succeeding well, we

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have managed to save that much, after our bills are paid. But what I mean is, dear, that if the sovereign should be wanted for anything else before Christmas Day, why I am afraid we should not be able to go.'

"'But what *could* happen, mother, between this and Christmas Day?'

"'We never can tell, my child, from one day to another. "Boast not thyself of to-morrow, for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth." Mind, darling, I am only preparing you in case of a disappointment. I know no reason why it should. And, Arthur,' she added gently, 'I may as well tell you that I should be quite as sorry as you would. You don't know how I long to see my dear father, and my old home!'

"At this moment the door opened, and Mr. Norton came back and told Arthur it was time for him to go to bed.

"He went off a little disturbed by his conversation with his mother, but consoling himself with the reflection that there was only one day more, and that nothing *could* happen between this and Christmas Day.

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"'How is Mary's tooth?' asked Mrs. Norton of her husband when the boy was gone.

"'I am afraid she has not heard the last of it,' he answered; 'it is curious so young a child should suffer so with a tooth. I am so afraid there is a gathering at the root of it, and if so, the sooner it comes out the better: she will never have any peace till it is gone.'

"'Is she in bed?' asked Mrs. Norton.

"'Ann was undressing her when I left,' said Mr. Norton, 'and is to knock on the floor as soon as Mary is in bed, as I promised to go up again to see her. If she is not better again to-morrow, I must take her to a dentist.'

"'I don't know where the money is to come from,' sighed Mrs. Norton.

"'We must give up our plan for Christmas,' said her husband.

"'Poor Arthur!' breathed Mrs. Norton to herself.

"'I shall be sorry for the children's disappointment,' said he, 'very sorry: but it cannot be helped.'

"At this moment, came two knocks from the room above, and Mr. Norton went up-stairs.

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Mrs. Norton sat very quiet after he was gone, looking at the fire; and I thought, as the red glow fell upon her eyes, I saw something very like tears glistening in them. I thought, too, I heard her say 'Poor Arthur!' to herself two or three times.

"I had plenty of time to think over all this, because it was some time before Mr. Norton came back, and Mrs. Norton and I had the room all to ourselves.

"I was getting rather sad myself at the thought of having to leave Mr. and Mrs. Norton, and Arthur, and Jack, and Mary. So that when Mr. Norton came down, I felt quite as anxious as his wife to hear that little Mary should be better, and my heart sank within me when I heard him say, 'She is very restless, and complains of a shooting pain in her gum. I am afraid it is as I thought.'

"'I must go up to her,' said Mrs. Norton, rising from her sofa.

"'You look so tired, dear,' said her husband, 'that I think you had better go to bed, and leave Mary to me. Is your head no better?'

"'Not much,' she answered; 'but you must

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let me attend to her first, and then I promise to go to bed.'

"So they went out of the room together, with their minds full of their suffering child, and neither of them remembered that I, who was to be the means of bringing her relief, was lying there, forgotten, on the table!

"I watched the fire gradually die out, and the room get darker and darker; and I longed to be a human being that I might run up-stairs and see how they were all getting on.

"It is a sad thing for us sovereigns, and half-sovereigns, and shillings, to have so little to do with the people among whom we are thrown. They cannot do without us; they even consider themselves happier for having a great many of us; and yet, when they are in trouble, we can do nothing to comfort them, and the only way in which we can serve them is by leaving them in the hour of their utmost need.

"So all night long I lay on the table, thinking of my probable fate on the morrow. I felt very sad at the thought of leaving these people I had already got so fond of; and

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probably never seeing or hearing of them again.

"It does happen to us sometimes to meet with other money which has been to the same places we have lived in: but it is quite a chance; and even if we do, ten to one we are sent off different ways again before we have had time to ask half enough questions about the dear people we remember.

"Several times during that long night I thought I heard footsteps overhead, as if people were moving about in the room above, and once or twice I fancied I heard poor little Mary crying.

"The first person that came into the room was Mrs. Norton, in her dressing-gown, looking pale and anxious, as if she had been up all night. She knelt down and lighted the fire, and began to boil the kettle and make a bread poultice.

"While she was doing this, the door opened, and Arthur came in. 'What are you doing, mother?'

"Oh, Arthur!' said she, 'poor little Mary has been in such pain all night with her tooth,

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and I am making her a poultice. If that does not relieve her, I am afraid she must have it out.'

"'Poor Mary!' said Arthur, 'I'm so sorry!'

"'So don't be out of the way,' added Mrs. Norton, 'because you will have to go and fetch the dentist, if he is wanted.'

"'Very well, mother,' said he; 'I will stay here, and then you will know where to find me.'

"The door opened, and Mr. Norton came in. 'Mary,' he said to his wife, 'I want the sovereign Mr. Smith paid yesterday.'

"'The sovereign?' she said; and I noticed she looked away from Arthur as she spoke. 'Do you want it directly, John?'

"'Yes, I think so,' he answered; 'the sooner we send for the dentist the better.

"I was watching Arthur's face as they spoke, and I saw him flush crimson to the roots of his hair.

"'Don't you remember, dear,' said Mrs. Norton, still keeping her face turned from the boy, 'that you dropped it in the shop, and Mary picked it up for you? I think she must

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have taken it to bed with her. I am going up with the poultice, and I will ask her.'

"'I will come with you,' said Mr. Norton, holding the door open for her to pass with the basin and the linen, 'so as to save you the trouble of coming down again.'

"As Mrs. Norton passed Arthur, I saw her stoop down and kiss his forehead, and I heard her whisper very softly, 'I am so sorry for you, darling!' But Arthur took no notice.

"As soon as the door was shut, he burst into a passion of tears, and stamped upon the ground with his feet. 'It is too bad, it is too bad!' he cried out, as he clenched both his hands together

"The bright sun shone full upon his angry eyes, with the hot tears glistening in them; and dazzled by the glare, he cast them down, and they fell upon me, sparkling and gleaming on the table.

"Arthur's whole face changed.

"'I will hide it,' he exclaimed, 'and then they can't change it to pay the dentist!'

"He put out his hand to take me up, and then drew it back

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"'The poultice will be sure to make Mary quite well,' he went on to himself, 'and she won't like having her tooth out, so it will not be unkind to her to hide it. I'm sure mother thought the poultice would do quite well; it is only father who makes such a fuss.'

"And yet, though Arthur excused himself like this, the hand with which he took me up was trembling all over.

"'Of course, if Mary gets worse,' he went on, 'I will put it back, but I really don't think she is very bad; and suppose we were to send for the dentist, and have to change the sovereign, and so lose our day with grandfather in the country, and *then* find the poultice would have done quite well, how sorry we should all be! How disappointed Jack and Mary would be, and mother too! Why she told me herself she should be quite as sorry as I should.

"How I longed for a tongue to say, 'Don't do it, because it is wrong.' I am sure a word would have made Arthur see what a bad thing he was going to do: but I had no tongue to speak with; and lay there, in his hot and trembling hand, a cold, solid lump, earnestly

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longing, but utterly powerless, to save him from the temptation.

"I think a thought that he was doing wrong came into the poor boy's mind just for a minute; a good thought sent by the God who is always near us, though we cannot see him; for he half turned me over, as if he were going to put me back.

"If Arthur had remembered that God is around and about us everywhere, and understands our temptations and difficulties, he would surely have asked Him to help him now: but I suppose he was not thinking about it, and so being only a weak little child, he was not able to drive away the devil who was tempting him so strongly. Footsteps were heard in the passage outside, and he hastily dropped me into his pocket.

"It was Mr. Norton who came in, looking very hurried. 'Oh, are you there, Arthur?' he said; 'I have a job for you. I am going to write a note for you to take to the dentist, so put on your hat; and before you go, just get the sovereign. Mary says she left it on the table.'

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"He sat down and began to write. I could not, of course, see Arthur's face, as I was in his waistcoat pocket; but I felt his heart go thump, thump against me. He moved slowly towards the table, and then I heard him say, in a low, trembling voice, 'It is not there, father.'

"'Not there!' exclaimed Mr. Norton; 'nonsense, child, look again. It must be there. It cannot have run away in the night.'

"Again I felt Arthur move slowly towards the table, and then again came the trembling voice: 'I have looked all over the table, and it is not there.'

"'Ann must have seen it and put it away,' said Mr. Norton, still writing; 'run and ask her, and be quick, for I want to send you off with the note.'

"I could feel Arthur's heart beating quicker than ever. I could hear how the door-handle rattled in his poor trembling fingers; and I could not help feeling sorry for him, though he was acting so very, very wrongly.

"His sin was bringing its own punishment already, and he must bear its consequences.

"I suppose he went into the kitchen, for I

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heard his faltering, uneven steps on a brick floor, and there was a sound of chopping, as if some preparation for cooking were going on. 'Ann,' he said; but his voice was so low that it could not be heard above the noise; and the chopping went on more vigorously than ever.

"'Ann, Ann,' said Arthur, almost crying. The chopping stopped, and Arthur hurried on with his message. 'Father told me to ask you what you have done with it,' said he.

"'Done with what?' an astonished and indignant voice exclaimed.

"'Why, the sovereign, of course,' said Arthur, peevishly.

"'Sovereign, of course!' said the indignant voice again, 'what sovereign, and what do you mean? And Lor! what's the matter with you? Are you ill?'

"'No,' said Arthur, 'I'm not ill; but father's told me to be quick, so please make haste, and tell me what I am to say to him.'

"'Well, I never!' exclaimed Ann; 'you come into the kitchen, looking as white as a ghost, and talk about "sovereign, of course," and I don't know what else, and then you ask

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me to tell you what you're to say. You must please to tell me what *you've* got to say, before I can possibly tell you what *I've* got to say.' And then Ann turned her back, and the chopping went on louder than ever.

"'Oh, Ann!' said the boy, and there was a ring of pain in his voice that made my heart ache for him, 'please come and speak to him yourself.'

"'Not I,' said Ann, 'I'm busy making some broth for your little sister, and have no time to run about the house chattering——'

"At this moment came loud shouts of 'Arthur, Arthur,' and the boy started as if he had been shot. He began to speak hurriedly—'It is a sovereign, Mary, left on the table last night, and father wants it for the dentist, and now—it is—it is gone—at least, it is not on the table—and he wants to know—he told me to ask you—if you have moved it—or put it away.'

"Poor Arthur! I was glad to find he did not add to his fault by saying anything that was not true.

"'Well, *now* I understand,' said Ann; 'but

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I've not seen no sovereign nowhere about. However,' and her chair scratched all along the brick floor with a grating noise, as she pushed it back from the table, 'I'll go and look for it. I'm coming, sir,' she called out, as renewed shouts came from Mr. Norton of 'Arthur! Ann! Ann! Arthur!'

"Arthur followed very slowly, and he waited a minute or two outside the sitting-room door, as if he could not make up his mind to open it.

"He took me out of his pocket, and looked at me, as if he were considering whether he would give it all up; and I was quite shocked to see how sad were the brown eyes, that had glowed with excitement the evening before, while he talked with his mother about Christmas Day.

"Then he put me back in his pocket suddenly, and walked into the room.

"There was a great hunt going on: Ann, and Jack, and Mr. Norton seemed all to be on their hands and knees on the floor. Mr. Norton seemed very excited and angry, and scolded Arthur for having been so long. He

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was asking questions of every one at once, and I trembled lest Arthur's turn should come.

"'Now try and remember, all of you,' he said, 'exactly what happened. Mary brought it in, and put it on the table. Did anybody touch it afterwards?'

"Down went Arthur on his hands and knees on the floor, and his heart beat quicker than ever.

"'*I* didn't,' said Jack, 'and Mary didn't; and then we both went to bed, and left mother and Arthur in the room together. It must be either mother or Arthur who is the thief,' added Jack, laughing; 'we shall have the police coming here and saying, "Stop thief!" and then mother and Arthur will be marched off to prison. How should you like to be marched off to prison, Arthur?'

"'Don't talk nonsense, Jack,' said his father, angrily; 'this is no time for jokes and laughing. Your poor little sister is crying with pain, and I can do nothing for her till we find the sovereign.'

"Arthur moved uneasily when he heard this,

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and said, 'Did the poultice do no good, then, father?'

"'Poultice, fiddlesticks!' said Mr. Norton; 'she'll never know a minute's peace until the tooth is out. Run up, Arthur, and ask her if she is quite *sure* she left it on the table.'

"Just as Arthur reached the door, Mr. Norton said—'I wonder if either of you boys put it by mistake into your pockets, when you were all playing with your shillings. Empty your pockets, both of you, and——'

"But before he had finished the sentence, Arthur was out of the room, and running up the stairs.

"He took me out of his pocket, and held me tight with one hand, while he opened the bedroom with the other. Through the chinks of Arthur's fingers I saw poor little Mary lying on the bed with her face tied up, and Mrs. Norton standing over her. She had her back turned to the door, and did not hear Arthur come in.

"Arthur crept softly up to the mantel-piece, and tried to hide me under an extinguisher which stood there, but his hand shook so much

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that I rattled against the extinguisher-tray, and attracted Mrs. Norton's attention. 'Who's that?' she asked.

"Arthur hastily popped the extinguisher on me (as he thought), and turned round to the bed. In his haste, he did not perceive that I rolled like a hoop to the edge of the mantelpiece, and quietly dropped over on to the rug, where I lay comfortably concealed under the long hair of which it was composed.

"It was quite delightful to get out of a hot pocket, and to have a little air and light. I had felt very bored at the thoughts of being concealed under the extinguisher, as I could then have judged only by sound of what was going on; and in my new position I had a full view of all that was happening in the room.

"I saw Arthur standing at the foot of the bed, watching his little sister, and evidently so concerned at seeing her in such pain, that he had entirely forgotten the message on which he had been sent.

"Jack came running into the room. 'Father is waiting for your answer, and you are to come and empty your pockets directly.'

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"Arthur stammered out his message, and moved towards the door.

"'I want to speak to you before you go, dear,' said his mother, advancing to the fire.

"Arthur turned all sorts of colours, and came very unwillingly, keeping his eyes fixed on the extinguisher.

"His mother took both his hands in hers, and kissed him very fondly.

"'Arthur, darling,' she said in a low voice, 'I have not had an opportunity of speaking to you before, but I must tell you now how very, very sorry I have been for your disappointment; and the more so, as you have borne it so bravely, and never complained at all. I see you are so sorry for your little sister, that you have quite forgotten yourself, and you can't think, dear boy, what pleasure it has given me. I am going down now to look for the sovereign, for I remember exactly where it was on the table, and, meanwhile, you shall stay here and take care of Mary.'

"So saying, and without giving him time to answer, she kissed him again very tenderly,

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and, beckoning to Jack to follow her quietly, went downstairs.

"Children, have you ever read a verse in the Bible about heaping coals of fire? If so, you will understand a little how Arthur must have felt as he stood there, after his mother was gone.

"He had borne Ann's provoking manner, his father's sharpness, and his brother's careless jokes without a tear; but his mother's undeserved tenderness was too much for him, and sitting down by the bed-side, he hid his face in the clothes.

"Little Mary had shut her eyes, and seemed half asleep; and there was no sound in the room but the boy's half-suppressed sobs.

"It was some time before Mrs. Norton came back, and I was sorry to see how troubled she looked. 'Arthur, dear,' she said, 'it is very sad, but we can't find this sovereign anywhere. It is really most extraordinary. Your father is in a dreadful state of mind, and, as a last hope, wishes you to empty your pockets. I am sure you would remember if you had touched it, wouldn't you?'

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"Arthur's only answer was to empty his pockets, with downcast eyes and a blushing face.

"'I knew it would be of no use,' sighed his mother. 'How has Mary been?'

"Arthur raised his eyes, and spoke in his natural voice—'I think really better, mother; she has not cried at all since you went, and I think she is going to sleep.'

"Mrs. Norton stooped over the pillow for a moment, and when she turned round again, her face wore an expression of great relief. 'She is fast asleep,' she whispered; 'this is the best thing that could possibly have happened. She may wake up quite well. I will go down and tell your father, and then he will be happier about the sovereign. You are such a good nurse, Arthur,' she added, smiling, 'that I shall leave you in charge again.'

"She went downstairs, and the next arrival was Jack.

"'Mother is coming up directly to sit with Mary, and you and I may go out to spend our shillings,' he said, hopping about the room 'What are you going to buy, Arthur?'

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"'I don't know,' said Arthur, crossly, 'and I wish you wouldn't bother.'

"'You need not be so cross,' said Jack. 'What's the matter with you?'

"'Hush!' said Arthur, 'you will wake Mary if you make such a noise.'

"'But what present shall I buy for you?' persisted Jack.

"'Oh, nothing,' said Arthur. 'I don't want a present.'

"'Well, you *are* cross,' said Jack, opening his eyes very wide. 'I know what is the matter with you. You are angry with Mary because she has got a toothache, and prevented us going to grandfather's.'

"'Be quiet, do,' said Arthur, half crying.

"'It is just like mother's headaches,' Jack went on, highly delighted at the opportunity of giving his father's lesson second-hand. 'You think more of yourself than of Mary, so you are selfish. You are not half so good as Mary and me. *We* have made up our minds to be always thinking of mother's headaches, and as her head is hardly bad enough to-day to think much about, I am thinking of Mary's toothache

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too; so I've had no time to think of myself, and not being able to go to grandfather's.'

"'You are the most selfish of all,' burst out Arthur, 'for you are thinking so much about yourself and your stupid chatter, that you forget Mary is asleep, and you will wake her.'

"'I'm not selfish,' cried Jack.

"'You are,' said Arthur.

"'I'm not,' screamed Jack.

"'Be quiet,' muttered Arthur, 'or I will put you out of the room.' He advanced towards his brother, to put his threat into execution, looking meanwhile rather anxiously at Mary, who was beginning to stir in her sleep.

"The boys were so taken up with their quarrel, that they did not perceive, as I did, that their mother was standing in the door looking reproachfully at them. She advanced to part them, and I think she was going to send them both out of the room, when Mary woke up with such a sharp cry of pain, that Mrs. Norton hurried to the bed-side.

"'Run to Ann for another poultice, Jack,' she said; and Jack, too glad to get away, obeyed.

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"While Mrs. Norton was doing her best to soothe and comfort her little girl, I watched Arthur.

"He was crouching down by the window, and I could see that every cry from Mary went through and through him.

"It must indeed have been dreadful for him to feel it was through him she was suffering so much! Presently his face changed. The heavy miserable look passed away, and I knew in a moment he had made up his mind to give me up.

"Poor fellow! I knew it was no use, that he would not find me where he had left me; and I longed and longed for a voice to say, 'Here I am.' I quite dreaded to think of what the boy's feelings would be when he should lift up the extinguisher and find me gone!

"My only hope was that he would hunt all over for me, and so, perhaps, light on the place where I lay.

"I watched him with the greatest anxiety, as he got up from the floor, looking more like the Arthur I remembered the night I came into the family.

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"He came—I saw how bright his face was, and how eagerly he walked up to the mantelpiece, and then I felt his foot upon me, so I could see nothing more.

"I listened with all my might. I heard him take up the extinguisher, and then there was a long pause!

"At last he put it down again, moved one ornament after another, then went back to the extinguisher again, as if he could not believe he had made a mistake.

"Then he stooped down, and looked in the grate, moved poker, tongs, and shovel, and routed about among the cinders.

"He was breathing quick and short, and when he removed his foot, and I caught sight of his face, I saw that all the brightness had gone out of it.

"He laid himself full length on the rug, and peered under the grate, thinking, I suppose, that I might have rolled under it. As he did so, his face was so close to me, that I felt his breath upon me, and the very bit of long hair that concealed me brushed against his eyelids; but still he never perceived me.

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"He gave it up at last, and with a slow heavy step, returned to his corner by the window, crouching as before.

"Meanwhile Mary got worse every minute. Ann came up with a poultice, but it seemed to do no good at all

"Jack hovered about, doing all sorts of little jobs and messages for his mother, as if to try and make up for having woke his little sister; and his merry little face looked very penitent and remorseful.

"Mr. Norton came in, in a little while, and after watching Mary for a minute or two, made a sign to his wife, and they both came up to the fire.

"'I will go to Mr. Hunter, the dentist,' he said, 'and ask him if anything can be done to relieve her. He can be consulted gratis, I know, till ten o'clock; so if I run all the way, I may still catch him.'

"I don't think Mrs. Norton thought it would be of much use, to judge by the expression of her face. I suppose she felt there was nothing to be done but to take the tooth out;—but she only said, 'Very well,' and Mr. Norton hurried

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off. As she moved away from the fire, her eye fell on the rug, and for one moment I thought I was going to be found. It must have been my glitter that attracted her, for she stooped down a little, and looked closer.

"I was trembling with excitement, thinking that now at last all their troubles would be at an end; when a sudden cry of 'Mother!' from the suffering child distracted Mrs. Norton's attention, and she returned to the bedside.

"Time passed very slowly while Mr. Norton was away. Ann called the boys down to breakfast, but Arthur never moved, and his mother was too much occupied with Mary to notice it. I am sure he was longing to confess it all to her, but it was much too late now; she had no time to attend to him; so he remained huddled up in his corner, with his chin resting on his knees.

By-and-by, hasty footsteps were heard advancing, and Mr. Norton came quickly into the room, looking quite cheerful and excited. He was followed by Jack with a piece of bread and butter in each hand, and a face of eager curiosity.

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"'Mr. Hunter will be here directly,' said Mr. Norton to his wife; 'he won't hear of a fee. I never met a kinder or more warm-hearted man. He had just half an hour to spare before his first appointment, and insisted upon coming off at once. There is a ring now; I will go and let him in.'

"He returned in a few minutes, followed by a very kind-looking old man, with white hair.

"'Don't mention it, madam,' he said, as Mrs. Norton advanced towards him and began to express her thanks; 'I am only glad it should have happened on Christmas Eve instead of Christmas Day, as I should have been out of town to-morrow. 'My little girl,' he added, turning to Mary and removing the bandages previous to examining her mouth, 'you shall pay me by getting quite well, and eating your Christmas dinner with the rest.'

"Though it was a double tooth, it was only a first one with no fangs; so it was out in a moment; and so skilfully drawn that Mary had hardly begun to say, 'Oh!' before it was all over, and in a few minutes she was lying quite quiet and comfortable on her pillow.

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"'The only thing, you must remember, is to be very careful of cold,' said the dentist. 'You were not thinking, I suppose, of letting her go out to-morrow?'

"'We *were* going into the country,' said Jack, 'only we lost the sovereign.'

"'Going into the country?' said Mr. Hunter; 'dear! dear! what a pity you did not send for me as soon as she woke this morning. If I could have taken out the tooth a few hours earlier, I might have cooked her up for the journey. I am afraid, now, I do not dare give leave for her to go, as she is so weakened by the pain she has been suffering.'

"Fancy what Arthur must have felt on hearing this—hearing that he had been the means not only of causing his little sister all this pain, but also of depriving himself and all the rest of the Christmas in the country! I could not see his face—it was quite, quite hidden.

"It does not much matter now,' observed Jack, ruefully, 'because we've lost the sovereign.'

"'Hush! Jack,' said his father, laughing.

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"But Mr. Hunter took Jack on his lap and insisted on hearing the whole story.

"'It is the oddest thing I ever heard of,' he said, when the child had finished, 'but it is nonsense to say it is lost. It must be in the house somewhere. Let us all have a hunt together, and see if we can't find it. Unless a thief got in in the night, we are sure to come upon it. Up with the door-mats, shake the curtains, look hither and thither: see if we don't find it at last!'

"'We'll all hunt together,' repeated Jack, clapping his hands, and jumping about; 'see if we don't find it at last! But I'm afraid,' he added, stopping short in his dance, 'that we've looked everywhere where it is likely to be.'

"'Then we will look everywhere where it is *not* likely to be,' said the old dentist; 'that is just the mistake you have all made. Don't you see, Master Jack, that if it was where you expected it to be, it would not be lost at all. It is only because it has got into some place where you are not expecting to find it, that it does not turn up. That is what I am always telling my grandchildren. If you think a missing thing is

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in the coal-hole; then look in the sugar-basin; if you expect it to be in the inkstand, then look on the window-sill. Now what is the most unlikely place in the house for the sovereign to be in?'

"'This room,' said Jack, hopping about, and laughing, 'because it has never been here!'

"'Then we will search the room at once,' said Mr. Hunter, getting up from his chair.

"Jack started up in high delight, and looked into all the old poultices and bandages on the table. '*You* won't find such unlikely places as these to look into,' he said triumphantly to the dentist.

"'*I* shall begin with the window-sill,' replied Mr. Hunter, striding across the room, 'because there's no room on it for a sovereign to stand: but halloa!' he said, stopping short and pointing to Arthur, who, still huddled up in a lump, looked more like a bundle than a live creature, 'what *is* that?'

"'That's Arthur,' screamed Jack, in fits of laughter.

"'What! a boy!' said the dentist; 'well! in all the many years of my life, I never knew a

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"WHY DID YOU NOT COME AND HELP YOUR BROTHER AND ME TO LOOK FOR THE SOVEREIGN?" *Page* 203.

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boy sit so still as that, unless he were ill. Come here, sir,' he added, sitting down again, 'and let me have a look at you.'

"All eyes were now turned on Arthur, as he lifted up his tear-stained face, with his hair hanging all over his eyes: and he looked so confused and so wretched that his father and mother both exclaimed, 'Why, Arthur, what is the matter?'

"'Yes, what is the matter, sir?' repeated Mr. Hunter, eyeing the boy rather suspiciously, as he slowly rose and advanced to him. 'Leave him to me, madam, I beg,' he went on, as Mrs. Norton went anxiously towards Arthur; 'I have had five sons and seven grandsons, and I understand boys perfectly. Now tell me, Master Arthur, what has made you sit in a heap all the time I have been here?'

"Arthur looked first one way, and then another, tried to speak, but no words came

"His mother began to tell of his great disappointment, and his sorrow for his sister; but though the dentist listened very civilly, he only looked all the more suspicious.

"Why did you not come and help your

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brother and me to look for the sovereign?' he asked rather sharply.

"The wretched Arthur looked imploringly at his mother, but before she could interfere, Mr. Hunter turned suddenly to Mr. Norton, and said: 'Depend upon it, this boy knows something of the missing sovereign!'

"'Impossible,' exclaimed Mrs. Norton, indignantly; and Mr. Norton assured the dentist there was not a more honest or truthful boy in the world.'

"'Very well,' said Mr. Hunter, rising, 'of course it is no affair of mine, but see if I do not prove right in the end, some of these days.'

"He took up his hat, and was beginning to say goodbye, when Arthur suddenly exclaimed, 'It is all true, it is quite true,' and throwing himself into his mother's arms, he began to pour out the whole story.

"It was a little difficult to understand, for the boy's voice was choked with sobs, and he kept his face hidden; but that he was telling the truth, even the old dentist could not doubt.

"Mr. Hunter listened very attentively; frowned sometimes, and shook his head angrily

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at others; but when Arthur spoke of his misery at being praised and kissed by his mother, when he knew what far different treatment he had deserved, the old man's spectacles got unaccountably dim, and he was obliged to take them off and wipe them.

"But nothing could exceed poor little Jack's remorse, when he found how his careless words had added to Arthur's unhappiness. 'I'm so sorry, so sorry,' he cried, jumping up, and throwing his arms round Arthur. 'I *wish* I had not teased you, and I *wish* I had not said that you were cross, and I *wish* . . . .'

"'Come to me, my little man,' said Mr. Hunter, blinking furiously with both eyes, and drawing the child away; 'come to me, and let your brother finish his story.'

"So Arthur went on, keeping his face still hidden; but when he got to the part where Mary awoke crying, he raised his head, and looked the dentist straight in the face. 'I assure you, sir,' he said earnestly, 'that from that moment my mind was made up. It was only because I thought the poultices would cure Mary, and because mother said she might wake up from

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her sleep quite well, that I held out so long. Indeed, indeed, sir, I did not know she was so bad till I came up into the bedroom, and she went to sleep almost directly after that.

"'Then when I made it all worse by quarrelling with Jack, and waking Mary up, I went directly to the extinguisher to get the sovereign, but it was nowhere to be found!

"'I can never tell you how dreadful the next half-hour was; to hear Mary crying, and to see father and mother looking so miserable, and to know it was all my fault. I longed to get up and run away from the sound of Mary's crying, but I could not make up my mind to move, for fear anyone should notice how wretched I looked.

"'I wanted to tell mother all about it, but she could not have left Mary for a minute, and I knew my story would take a long while to tell.

"'I don't think *anyone* was so glad as I was when father came back, and said you would take out the tooth for nothing.

"'Oh, mother!' concluded the boy, bursting

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into tears again, 'I have been so very, very miserable; won't you forgive me?'

"And he hid his face again on her shoulder, and cried like a little baby.

"'Poor boy! poor boy!' she said, laying her cool hand on his throbbing head. 'I think he has been punished enough, sir; we need not say anything more.'

"'Yes, but I wish he had not punished other people too,' said the old gentleman. 'Here is my curly-headed friend, and my quiet little patient, who have hid no sovereigns and done no harm, losing their Christmas Day in the country as well as him. I don't like that at all. I tell you fairly, Master Arthur, that if you had never hid the sovereign, you would be all packing up to go now. Now, I hope you thoroughly understand what mischief you have done. I don't wish to be unkind, and I am sure you are very penitent; but still I hope you are as sorry for your brother and sister's disappointment as you are for your own. We never can do wrong without making other people suffer for it as well as ourselves. That is the worst of it.'

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"'Now, who are you most sorry for now; Jack and Mary, or yourself?'

"'I'm most sorry for mother,' sobbed Arthur, 'because she is longing to see her old father, and her old country home.'

"The dentist had evidently not expected this answer, and his face softened considerably. 'Are you quite sure of that?' he asked less severely.

"'*Quite* sure,' answered Arthur. 'I would spend Christmas Day all by myself, with no present, and no plum-pudding, if that could help mother and the rest to go to grandfather's.'

"There was no doubting the honest brown eyes, and the earnest manner.

"'Shake hands,' said Mr. Hunter; 'you are a good fellow, after all. And now the least you can do is to help Jack and me in the hunt your story interrupted. You have given us a clue, too, as to the sovereign's whereabouts. Under the extinguisher, did you say? Well then, boys, both of you, look all over the mantelpiece, move every ornament, and turn the clock topsy-turvy.'

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"The boys ran to obey his orders, but of course I was not to be found.

"'Never mind,' said the dentist, 'don't be disheartened yet. We have only just begun. Arthur, you are the strongest, move the fender; Jack, you are the slimmest, lie down and look under it. Now both of you, lift up the rug; shake it; shake it again; harder! harder still! again! Ha! what's that?'

"A loud hurrah broke from Jack as the last shake dislodged me from my hiding-place high into the air; and sent me clattering down upon the hearth-stone.

"The dentist waved his hat, Mary clapped her hands, Jack capered wildly about, and Arthur, picking me up, advanced to his mother, and with a deep blush, put me into her hand.

"'I'll tell you what,' said Mr. Hunter to Mary, 'you seem so much better that I believe you will be able to go after all. Get your mother to coddle you up well to-day, and to wrap you up well to-morrow. I'll send my brougham to take you to the station; and Jack,' he added suddenly, turning to the boy and putting a sovereign into his hand, 'will treat

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you to a fly at the other station, so you will get to your grandfather's as warm and comfortable as possible. But, good gracious!' he ended, pulling out his watch, 'it is nearly twelve o'clock, and I have had an unfortunate lady waiting to have her false teeth put in—in order that she may eat her Christmas Dinner—ever since half-past ten! I must be off at once.' So saying, and pursued by the farewells and thanks of the whole family, he seized his hat, and rushed out of the room.

"I should have liked very much to hear all that the family said and did, the rest of that day; but Mrs. Norton had grown wise by experience, and she locked me up safely in a little box.

"Of one thing I am quite sure, and that is, that they were all very happy; for as I lay in my dull dark box inwardly grumbling at my hard fate, I heard shouts of laughter every now and then.

"I really was very glad that they should all be happy at last, but still I began to pity myself again, when I thought how they would go merrily down into the country next day, and I

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should be left at the railway station to pay for the journey.

"At a station, there are always people hurrying to and fro, wanting change, so I was likely to get away again soon

"But still there was always the dreadful uncertainty of into whose hands I should fall. In this respect, we sovereigns are better off than our friends the shillings: because being so much more valuable, we seldom get among very low people: unless indeed we are stolen, which does occasionally happen.

"However, thieves always spend us as quick as possible, which is a great comfort.

"The day and night passed away, while I grumbled on to myself; and I suppose it was about nine o'clock next morning, when a key rattled in the lock, and the box was opened by Mrs. Norton.

"She was all ready dressed, with her best bonnet and shawl on, and she looked very neat and pretty. Mary was sitting on the bed, looking quite well, and Ann was putting on her hat for her.

"I had only time to take a quick look at

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all this, for Mrs. Norton popped me into her purse, and put it in her pocket.

"I was happier now than I had been in my box, for I could hear everything that went on.

"There were sounds from below of laughing and whistling and running about, and I could distinguish Jack's voice above all the noise.

"'Mother,' I heard little Mary say, 'I have been thinking that I'm not so good as Jack.'

"'Why not, dear?' asked Mrs. Norton.

"'Why, you know, mother,' said the little girl, 'I was thinking so much about my tooth yesterday, that I quite forgot about your headache. Now he was thinking about you and me all day.

"'How do you know he was?' asked Mrs. Norton.

"'Oh, because he told me so,' answered Mary in a tone of complete confidence; 'but why do you laugh, mother?'

"'Am I laughing, darling?' said Mrs. Norton. 'I did not know I was. I suppose it was at the thought of Jack believing himself able to think of any one thing for more than a few minutes at a time.'

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"'But it was two things, mother,' persisted Mary; 'my toothache and your headache. He says he took it by turns, and when he had done thinking about one, he began to think about the other. Now I'm going to think about your head all the way in the carriage, all the way in the train, all the way in the fly, and all the evening at grandfather's!'

"'Oh, please not,' said Mrs. Norton, laughing; 'and indeed you need not, my dear child; for really and truly I have no headache at all to-day. I do not know when I have felt so well for a long time.'

"The conversation was interrupted by the door being burst open with a crash, and Jack announcing that the carriage was waiting at the door.

"'I have got Mr. Hunter's sovereign quite safe, mother,' he said, as they all hurried down, 'and I shall pick out the smartest fly for Mary that we can find at the station.'

"We were some time packing into the brougham, but we were off at last; Arthur, Mary, and their mother inside, and Jack and his father on the box with the coachman.

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"The horses' hoofs sounded hard on the ground.

"'A frost, Arthur,' said his mother; 'you will be able to slide in the ruts.'

"'Yes,' said Arthur's voice, with a happy ring in it which did my heart good to hear; 'and you will go to the old church, mother, and you will sit just where you used when you were a little girl, and you will hear the school children sing your favourite hymn.'

"'What hymn?' asked little Mary.

"'One of the most beautiful hymns in the world, darling,' answered her mother—'"Hark! the herald angels sing." I never think any choir sing it so sweetly as the school children used in the old church. How well I remember practising it up the week before Christmas Day; and singing it with my sisters just before starting for church, to be quite sure we had got it all right; and the walk along the hard road all together; and the icicles on the trees and on the gabled roof of the old porch; and the neighbours standing outside, waiting to say 'A merry Christmas.' I am glad my darlings will see and know it all, that when they

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are as old as I am, they may look back to it as I do.'

"The front window of the brougham was now let down violently, and Jack's voice was heard shouting, 'The station! the station!'

"Noise, bustle, and confusion now reigned around me, and I had no further idea of what we were about, till I felt a hand in the pocket, and the purse that contained me was drawn out, while Mrs. Norton's soft voice said, 'Two whole and three half second class tickets to——'

"The snap of the purse sounded, and I was free again. Mrs. Norton was putting me down, when Arthur, who was standing by, whispered, 'Let me have one more look at it, mother.'

"He took me in his hand, and looked at me for a few minutes in silence. I think he was going over past events in his own mind, for he looked very grave; but his mother put her arm round him, and said softly, 'It has brought you a great deal of sorrow, darling; but that is over, and it is, I trust, now going to give you a great deal of pleasure.'

"As Arthur returned me to her, Mr. Norton

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and Jack came hurrying up. 'Be quick, the seats are taken, and it is time to get in.'

"Then I felt my time had come, and that their happiness was to be bought by my sorrow. I could have clung to Mrs. Norton's soft hand and kissed it, as she gently laid me down on the ticket counter.

"But before the ticket-man picked me up, I had time to take one more look at the family, as they stood in a group together.

"Mr. Norton had taken Mary up in his arms, and was wrapping her up in a huge shawl, and both were laughing because she said he tickled her throat by tucking it up so close round it. Mrs. Norton was putting the change into her purse, and looking as bright and well as if there were no such things as headaches in the world. Jack was hopping first on one leg, and then on the other, in his impatience to be off; and Arthur was standing by his mother's side, with a happy expression on his face, which I had never seen there before.

"For one moment I looked at them all as they stood. The next, the bell sounded, and

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they all hurried off—Arthur and his mother hand in hand, Mary in her father's arms, and Jack careering wildly on in front.

"And then I was flung carelessly down into the money-box, and I saw them no more."

"And is that really the end?" said Tiney, as her father took up the Sovereign, and put it in his pocket.

"Really the end," he answered; "and what's more, it is half-past five."

The tea-bell rang at the same moment, and the children all went up-stairs.

THE END.

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